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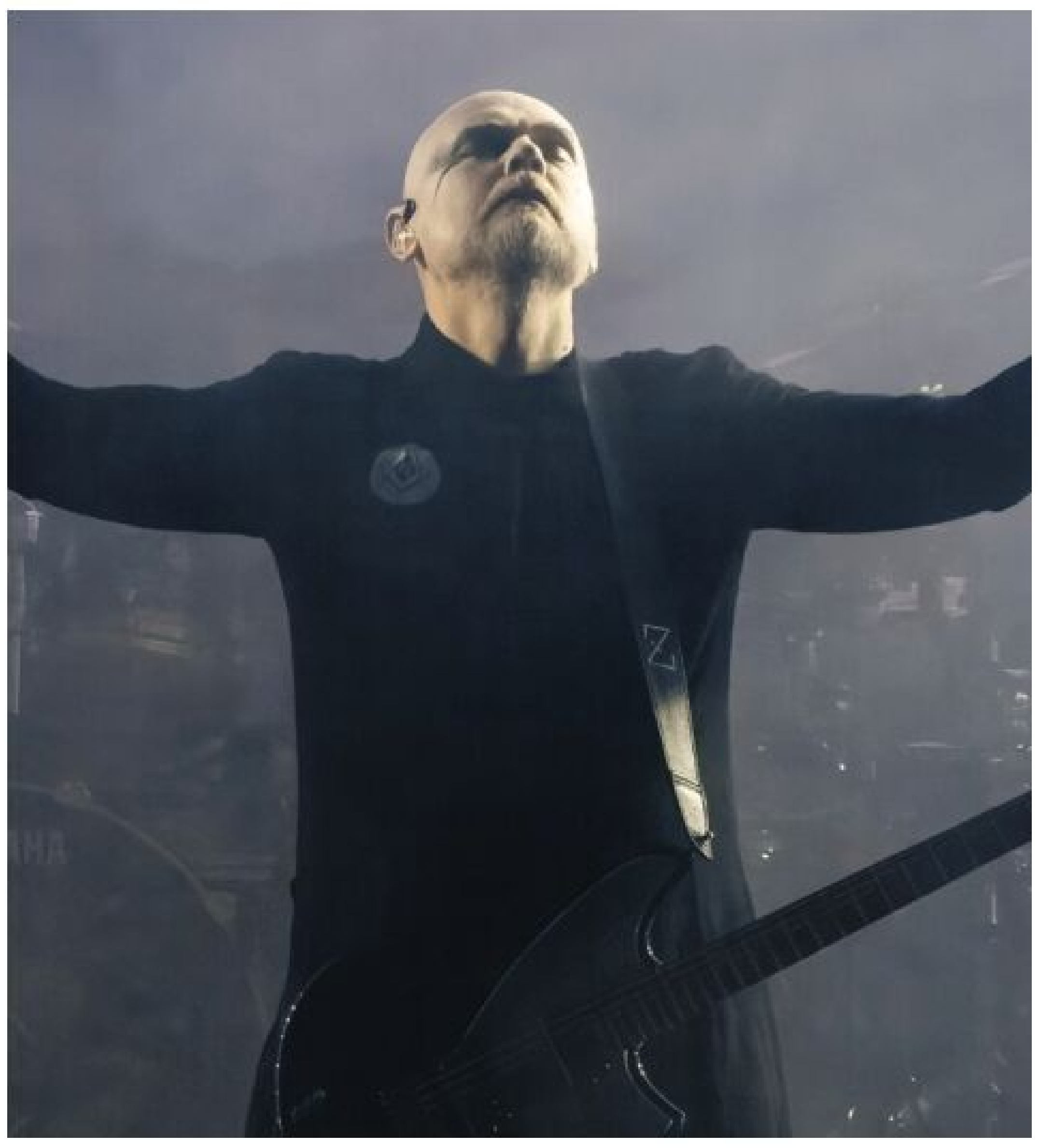
# BILLY CORGAN CLAIMS BUTCH VIG STOLE HIS GUITAR SOUND FOR NIRVANA'S *NEVERMIND*

Photo credit Astrida Valigorsky / Getty



Billy Corgan has joked in a new video for Laney that he felt Butch Vig "stole" his guitar sound when he went in to work with Nirvana on *Nevermind*. The Smashing Pumpkins man has recently signed with Laney and in a spirited longform video interview with the amp brand, he dipped into the ongoing debate on who developed the grunge sound.

"Success has many masters and failure has but one," acknowledges Corgan. "People say, 'Who invented the grunge sound?' Soundgarden were the first band of that era where I thought, 'OK, something different is happening... But I think, being from Chicago, we were very influenced by what came out of Detroit: the Stooges, Ted Nugent, Bob Seeger. Those are tougher, rougher bands. Seattle was a little more psychedelic."

Corgan says the Detroit edge – alongside a lifetime of UFO, 'Zeppelin and 'Sabbath listening – fed into the Pumpkins developing a meaner hard rock sound than their West coast contemporaries.

"[In Chicago] you better bring it with the rock or you're going to get booed out of the building," says Corgan. "So we had a tougher take on it... once Jimmy and I decided we were going to go heavy, we went all in – and that's when I started gaining my amplifiers."

Corgan implies that he took that sound into the studio with Vig when they worked on the Smashing Pumpkin's debut album, Gish.

"A story I like to tell is we recorded our album Gish in 1990, going into 1991," says Corgan, in semi-seriousness. "[Butch Vig] left that album to go and make Nevermind with Nirvana.

"The first time I heard Nevermind, I looked at Butch Vig – we were sitting next to a lake on a July 4th day circa 1991 – and I said, 'Motherfucker, you stole my guitar sound!' So that's all I'll say about that..." **Words by Matt Parker**

# BLINK-182 TOUR CONFIRMED

Last issue we reported on the rumoured return of Tom DeLonge to Blink-182. Not only has that rumour come true, but the pop punk threesome have announced an Australian tour, and it's a massive one. At the time of writing, the group has announced 12 Aussie shows and two in New Zealand, with the tour kicking off in February 2024. That big 12 show blow-out was originally a mere eight, but such was the predictable demand, more shows were added. Blink-182 will be supported by Rise Against for all shows, with tickets available (assuming they're not sold out!) at livenation.com.au.

It's a big change in tune from Hoppus' words back in August, when the possibility of an original line-up reformation was all but shot down.

"There is no news to share. There is no announcement," he said. "If and when Blink has any announcement about anything, you will hear it from the official Blink-182 outlets." Well, the official Blink-182 outlets have spoken.

**Words by Shaun Prescott**

# LINE 6 ISSUES MEGA HELIX UPDATE, DUBBED "THE BIGGEST SONIC IMPROVEMENT" SINCE LAUNCH

Line 6 has introduced what looks like a game-changing firmware update to its Helix multi-effects and amp modeler family, which has been dubbed "the biggest sonic improvement to Helix since it first shipped back in 2015".

Usually, such bold claims are viewed with caution, but it looks as though Line 6 has well and truly delivered on its word. As an overview, the free 3.50 update is impressively comprehensive, debuting five amps, seven effects and a swathe of new features. The biggest news is the updated IR engine, which has been completely rebuilt in a bid to deliver improved sonic options and usability, the likes of which have never been seen in the Helix family since its inception. With the new IR engine, Line 6 has also introduced 20 guitar cabs and four bass cabs, which can be paired with a choice of 12 microphones. When working in the HX Edit 3.50 application, players can also manipulate mic angle, position and distance, adding a boatload of new tonal possibilities. Otherwise, tweaks to the mic positions can be made in the HX unit. And that's just scraping the surface: if you own a Helix go check it out, or if you're in the market for one, the deal just got sweeter.

**Words by Matt Owen**

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OVER A DOZEN INTERVIEWS
THE BLUES ISSUE
ALTER BRIDGE

#151

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FUTURE

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## FIVE ISLAND DRIVE

**THEY ARE** A trio of genre-bending vibronauts wreaking havoc on Eora country with a fierce sound and even fiercer message. They (quite aptly) describe their “trance-flavoured mosh” as what would happen “if Denzel Curry met with Rammstein to write a Sega soundtrack”.

**KINDA LIKE** Hacktivist, RedHook, Ecca Vandal and Enter Shikari.

**CHECK OUT** Their equally poignant and pernicious debut EP, *White Rose*. Armed with an arsenal of intense riffs, mind-shattering beats and cold-hot vocal flows that put some of nu-metal’s greatest to shame, the record – named in tribute to one of history’s most iconic anti-fascist movements – sees Five Island Drive raise a pissed-off middle finger to a cruelly regressive status quo.

Photo by Kim Quint (editing by Bradley Michael de Leon)

## FUTURE STATIC

**THEY ARE** A Naarm-based quintet of djent-angled deviants from whom no speaker is safe. Their quixotic sonic chaos is steered by the shredding of Ryan Qualizza and Jack Smith, whose contrasting ultra-bright melodies and punishing chugs galvanise a mighty bedrock for singer Ami Cook to glide over.

**KINDA LIKE** Spiritbox, Dream State, Saosin and Bring Me The Horizon.

**CHECK OUT** The pummelling ‘Venenosa’, which alongside last year’s soaring and solo-heavy ‘Waves’ will appear on Future Static’s debut album (due out in 2023). If you’ve caught this column in time, too, you can hear both live at the band’s first-ever headline show: they’ll be tearing the Northcote Social Club to shreds on Saturday December 10th.

Photo by Andrew Basso

## HOLLIE COL

**SHE IS** A bubbly songstress from Eora country wading through (and celebrating) the labyrinth of early-twenties self-discovery, queer love and a cyclone of emotions with her twangy and slick – and almost defiantly human – indie-pop.

**KINDA LIKE** HAIM, Tegan & Sara, Taylor Swift and John-Allison Weiss.

**CHECK OUT** Her simultaneously grandiose and quaint concept EP *Julia Stevens*, a heart-melting romance bursting at the seams with colour and charm. Col wrote it over three years, she recently told Triple J, “with each song time-capsuling a particular feeling” that the record “amalgamate[s]” into a story “that detailed every experience [she’s] ever had in love”.

Photo by Ash Brooks

## PLATONIC SEX

**THEY ARE** A quartet of Meanjin-based luminaries carrying the torch for the kind of angsty, scuzzed-out indie-rock made iconic Down Under by Screamfeeder, Magic Dirt et al. They’ve mastered the art of the ebb and flow, with their songs effortlessly gliding from gentle and buoyant melodies to wall-shaking blasts of axe-based anarchy.

**KINDA LIKE** Sweater Curse, Screamfeeder, Pavement and Phantastic Ferniture.

**CHECK OUT** The trio of singles they’ve dropped in ‘22: the crunchy and mosh-ready ‘Disappoint Another’, the diesel-fuelled feminist anthem ‘Devil’s Advocate’, and the grippingly emotive sonic rollercoaster that is ‘Exhausted Competing For You’. All will appear on their debut EP, due out by the year’s end.

Photo by Jacob McCann

## FVNERAL

**THEY ARE** Seven melancholic masterminds who, with rich and riveting soundscapes that take their listener on journeys before frontpeople Tim Blunt and Ally Turner even sing a word, lay their souls bare like the world depends on it… And honestly, it might.

**KINDA LIKE** The National, American Football, Soccer Mommy and Big Thief.

**CHECK OUT** Their heady and heartrending debut EP, *When I Get Sober*, which the Eora-based collective say is their “attempt to articulate the heaviest parts of the human experience”. It’s a glittering kaleidoscope of acoustic and electric guitars, keys, strings, horns and more, all brought together with moving reflections on love, loss, gender, addiction, mental illness and morality.

Photo by Jay Wennington

## SPEED

**THEY ARE** The future’s voice in Australian hardcore, using their convulsive prongs of down-tuned grit and guttural might as a vehicle for change. Based on Eora country, the band say their mission is “to positively grow the hardcore scene by challenging cultural norms, embracing diversity, and promoting compassion across political and racial lines”.

**KINDA LIKE** Terror, Deathbed, Stick To Your Guns and Knocked Loose.

**CHECK OUT** The beautifully savage *Gang Called Speed* EP, which sent a tidal wave through the industry when it landed back in June. Jem Siow’s lyrics are fiercely confronting, their impact amplified intensely by the way Josh Clayton and Dennis Vichidvongsa let all hell break loose on their fretboards.

Photo by Jack Rudder

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Photo: Tom Lewis

# HALLIE

**HAILS FROM** MEANJIN/BRISBANE, QLD
**PLAYS** SOLO (WITH A BACKING BAND)
**SOUNDS LIKE** EARLY '00s POP-ROCK WITH A MODERN SHEEN
**LATEST DROP** *THIS IS LOVE* (EP OUT FEBRUARY 3 INDEPENDENTLY)

**What's your current go-to guitar?**
My current go-to is my sunburst Stratocaster. It's been my favourite for years now and I'm just in love with it. It sounds so beautiful, and it was the first guitar I bought for myself so it holds a lot of sentimental value for me!

**How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?**
Growing up, I had my dad's Maton acoustic around the house. I remember my parents bought me one of those pink K-Mart nylon-string guitars, which was also really cool, but I also wanted to play dad's Maton. We used to play folk music together, and our go-to was 'Fire And Rain' by James Taylor. That was one of the first songs I learned to play.

**What inspires you as a player?**
Growing up, a lot of Taylor Swift – I started my songwriting before I learned to play, so I loved using guitar as an accompanying tool moreso than a feature. At the moment, I love channeling my love of playing with textures and sounds; it's been really exciting to explore and produce guitars in ways in that I never would have thought of. Beabadoobee's riffs have me most mesmerised currently. She has such incredible and simple, yet unique ways to match catchy guitar lines with catchy melodies, and oftentimes both feel just as important as each other.

**Are you much of a gear nerd?**
I am not a gear nerd, to be honest! I love trying out pedals and sounds, but I am horrible with names and will never remember what I'm using – I'll tell you what it sounds like, though! I love my Fender Blues Junior amp, though, that's definitely an asset to my playing!

**Do you have any 'white whales'?**
I really would love a Hofner Ignition Series Violin Bass in my collection – they are so beautiful to play! Also, I love my Strat but a full-bodied Tele would be amazing, especially for live.

**What would your signature model look like?**
It would be bright orange, it would sound like a Telecaster, and the headstock would be heart-shaped. Am I sure that's possible? No, but that's the dream!

**If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...**
Right now, probably Beabadoobee! I know she experiments a lot with alternative tunings and I would love to sit down, get experimental and write some hits with her!

Photo: Maclay Heriot

# LACHLAN SIMPSON

**HAILS FROM** WARRANG/SYDNEY, NSW
**PLAYS IN** DEAR SEATTLE
**SOUNDS LIKE** SUN-KISSED INDIE FOR ROAD-TRIP PLAYLISTS
**LATEST DROP** *SOMEDAY* (LP OUT NOW VIA DOMESTIC LA LA)

**What's your current go-to guitar?**
My current go-to guitar is my Hagstrom Viking semi-hollow. I alternate between that, my Fender HSS Stratocaster and my Squier J Mascis signature Jazzmaster for our live shows. I came across the Hagstrom by chance at the Swop Shop in Melbourne, and it caught my eye instantly. It's a cool gold color and it plays smooth as butter.

**How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?**
I think my love of guitar came from early exposure to punk music, which almost exclusively came from the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* soundtracks. From there I would obsessively search online for new bands to jump onto, and I just never stopped. My mum bought me my first guitar from a local music shop. It was one of those beginner kits that comes with a cheap Strat rip-off and a tiny practice amp, but it was perfect. Unfortunately for everyone within earshot, I had also bought a Boss Metal Zone pedal.

**What inspires you as a player?**
J Mascis from Dinosaur Jr. is a massive influence on my style and what I try to bring to Dear Seattle. The way he blends fuzz with cranked Marshalls is awesome. Also the guitar work from the band Title Fight is a huge inspiration for me. The way they implement hammer-ons and interesting chords in lieu of powerchords definitely shows up in my playing.

**Are you much of a gear nerd?**
I have always tried to keep my rig pretty simple in terms of gear. Until very recently I was running my guitar into a Lehle ABY Switcher, which ran into a Marshall JCM800 and a Fender Twin Reverb. In terms of pedals I was running an Ibanez TS9 tube screamer, a TC Hall Of Fame reverb and a Boss DD-7 delay.

This was all working great, but due to the unreliability and cost of some hire amps, we've recently moved to the Line 6 Helix. That allows us and our sound guy to really dial in tones, and gives us freedom to explore sounds without the need to buy pedals. Ultimately I'd love to find the perfect amp to tour with, but for now the Helix Floor is working great.

**Do you have any 'white whales'?**
I would love to get my hands on a '70s Hiwatt Custom 100, and I would love to have a vintage Les Paul... I might need to win the Lotto to fund this dream.

**What would your signature model look like?**
I love unusual offset shapes in guitars. I would have to go for a Gibson Firebird-style body with a Fender Starcaster-style neck. I would go with a P-90 in the bridge, a single coil in the middle, and a Tele-style pickup in the neck.

**If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...**
I would love to teach Jimi Hendrix how to play 'Party In The USA' by Miley Cyrus.

Photo: Press/Supplied

## MAX JACOBSON

**HAILS FROM** WARRANG/SYDNEY, NSW
**PLAYS IN** GRENADE JUMPER
**SOUNDS LIKE** BLISSED-OUT FUELED BY RAMENESQUE POST-POP
**LATEST DROP** 'DID YOU IMAGINE' (SINGLE OUT NOW INDEPENDENTLY)

**What's your current go-to guitar?**
I've had my Fender Fat-Strat since my bar mitzvah. I remember seeing that Rivers Cuomo of Weezer played a Strat, but their records sounded so thick and heavy – then I learnt what a "Fat-Strat" was and I figured if it could sound like both Weezer and Hendrix, then what can't it do? And that's true.

**How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?**
It started with Green Day, really. Seeing an eye-linered Billie Joe Armstrong on MTV, swearing and slinging his guitar around, struck some sort of nerve in me. I had never seen that before as an eight-year-old, I was being told not to swear, but here is an adult flipping me off on TV? Blew my mind! As a result I had to learn how to play guitar. Then my parents got me a mini Squire guitar, and I quickly plastered it with stickers so it could look like Billie Joe's Strat.

**What inspires you as a player?**
There's so many, beyond just guitarists as well. I love everything from folk to jazz to film scores, and there's always a kernel to be found in all those things that impact my own playing. A huge one for me would be George Harrison, he always knew the right thing to play at all times. He served the song, and he knew that was the most important thing because he was a great songwriter as well as a guitarist. He taught me the art of restraint.

I also love the film composer Alexandra Desplat, particularly his work with Wes Anderson. His soundtracks feel very quaint and ornamented, much like Anderson's films. I hope our music has some of that in it.

**Are you much of a gear nerd?**
Not really. My favourite piece of gear is my Fender Vox combo amp – it used to be Brae's from Dear Seattle. It just does everything you need it to, and loudly. It's also not too heavy.

**Do you have any 'white whales'?**
I'd really like a sunburst Les Paul Custom that looks like the one Ace Frehley played, that's the pinnacle of cool-looking guitars to me.

**What would your signature model look like?**
Rick Nielsen from Cheap Trick's five-neck guitar is definitely my main inspo, hopefully my version will be easier to play because he does look like he struggles with that thing. Why not go all-out if you get to design your own guitar?

**If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...**
Beabadoobee. Who I believe is probably the best rock artist out now. Top of the list for me. Jamming with Prince or David Bowie would be incredible as well. Although I'd have no business playing guitar in front of either of them, I'd be happy just to watch them do their thing. I'd add Madonna to this jam session too, she's maybe the coolest person ever.

Photo: Rohan Thompson

## VIKTOR RUFUS

**HAILS FROM** NGAMBRI/CANBERRA, ACT
**PLAYS WITH** KIRKLANDD
**SOUNDS LIKE** A GLITCHY FUSION OF RAP-ROCK AND POP-PUNK
**LATEST DROP** 'OTHERSIDE' (SINGLE OUT NOW VIA STAINED. INC)

**What's your current go-to guitar?**
It's a tie between my 1971 Gibson ES-335 and 1991 Modulus Graphite Fender Stratocaster. The 335 was bought on my first trip to New York City. I was talking to the great jazz guitarist Adam Rogers about where to go shopping, and he said he had one for sale and was happy for it to go to someone that wasn't a "schmuck". It played like a dream, and still does to this day.

My Stratocaster was a 30th birthday present to myself, and is played at just about every other gig that the 335 isn't. It's got this wicked carbon fibre neck and the most aggressive-looking Floyd Rose Kahler bridge, but plays with the clarity of an undisturbed mountain lake and has that characteristic fourth position chank.

**How did you initially fall in love with the instrument?**
I didn't sleep well as a child. My dad would sit me in front of the TV late at night and we'd watch video clip after video clip on ABC's *Rage* until I drifted off. At that age, all I wanted to do was have a terrible mullet and play wailing solos on big festival stages. I started learning classical guitar at the age of eight, not knowing that playing Piazzolla and Villa-Lobos didn't usually coincide with the aforementioned shredding and hairstyles. Soon I became enamoured by Bach and Tarrega, followed by Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin and Rage Against The Machine.

**What inspires you as a player?**
Jazz guitarists Emily Remler, Jim Hall and Gilad Hekselman were my biggest influences in university. Their improvisational and accompaniment style was so considered and composed, glueing everything together with the bigger picture in mind. I take that philosophy to every bandstand, no matter the genre or instrumentation, and try to hear every song as a producer, approaching my parts with the notion of how this serves the art and compliments the arrangement.

Multi-instrumentalist Nate Mercereau and vocalist Moses Sumney are my current obsessions, with their unique textural approaches and beautiful ability to express a melody and construct a harmony.

**Are you much of a gear nerd?**
Personally I don't think I'm that much of a gear head, but I'm sure everyone I play with would say otherwise. I have recently delved into the world of digital modelling with the Neural DSP Quad Cortex. The size, processing power, flexibility and accuracy of profiling (not to mention the ability to create a quadraphonic sound field) are astonishing. It has revolutionised how I think about approaching every song with a unique sonic perspective.

**Do you have any 'white whales'?**
Sean Costello's Goldtop Gibson Les Paul always sounded so good. I'd love to play it some day. If someone were to offer me a Dave Grohl signature Gibson DG-335 with the Trini Lopez diamond holes, too, I wouldn't say no...

**What would your signature model look like?**
It'd be a slim, seven-string hollowbody with a selectable 335/Strat hybrid sound and a synth/MIDI pickup for all the texture combinations imaginable. I'd have two – one with an EVH Wolfgang colour design in the texture of Jackson Pollock's Blue Poles, and one just bare and blonde, ready to be roadworn.

**If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive...**
Julian Lage makes his blackguard Telecaster sing, and his approach is so musically wholesome. Getting to jam with him on that Tele or his Manzer Archtop while I play my 1954 Gibson ES-175, calling a tune like 'All The Things You Are' or 'Falling Grace', would be a dream come true.

PHOTO BY MATTHEW BAKER

# BEABADOOBEE

**WHERE** THE TIVOLI, MEANJIN/BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND **WHEN** SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 11TH, 2022 **REVIEW** ELLIE ROBINSON

The Tivoli is a beautiful theatre, stately and regal with its art deco aesthetic, tiered standing platforms and bar staff clad in suits – a fitting castle for Gen Z's indie-pop queen, Beabadoobee (aka Beatrice Laus), whose Brisbane show rounded out her first-ever tour of Australia. That it even went ahead is commendable: early on in her set, Laus admitted to the crowd that she'd been walloped by a gnarly cold. But we honestly couldn't tell – not only did Laus power through the night with impressive energy, she absolutely stunned with her vocal prowess.

Part of that can be attributed to the use of backing tracks, but those never took the spotlight away from Laus' own soft and melodic tenor, instead utilised to add depth and colour to the soundscape. As a whole, the mix sounded full and rich, thanks in no short part to Laus' touring bandmates (Jacob Bugden on guitar, Louis Semlekan-Faith on drums and Eliana Sewell on bass). Where her songs often feel lowkey and roomy on record, here they were vivid and eruptive.

Most surprising was how much of his own flavour Semlekan-Faith brought to the fold, amping up the energy with fills that erred more towards punk than Laus' comfy indie-pop. It felt right, though, with Laus and Bugden both matching his fervour on their fretboards. Laus herself spent most of the set swapping between two Strats, one butterscotch and the other a sickly neon green, with the former used for a bulk of her most memorable riffs (and a downright tearing solo on show closer 'Cologne').

Also worth mentioning was a turquoise Strat that stole the show on 'Sorry', where it enveloped Laus' angelic singing with a tasteful grit, grungy and twangy and far, far under-utilised throughout the night. The acoustic guitar, though, was utilised perfectly: Laus first brought it out for 'See You Soon', where her and Bugden's gentle strumming was contrasted by the sharpness brought by Semlekan-Faith and Sewell, and rounded out nicely by the unobtrusive synth tracks. She played 'Coffee', the first song of her encore, solo

**SETLIST**

1. Worth It
2. Together
3. Charlie Brown
4. Care
5. Yoshimi, Forest, Magdalene
6. He Gets Me So High
7. See You Soon
8. The Perfect Pair
9. Sun More Often
10. Sorry
11. She Plays Bass
12. Dye It Red
13. Talk
14. 10:36
15. Back To Mars
16. Last Day On Earth

——————————

17. Coffee
18. Cologne

PHOTO BY MATTHEW BAKER

PHOTO BY LORNE THOMSON

on the acoustic – it was expectedly beautiful, but damn near inaudible with her crowd delivering a singalong nothing short of rhapsodic; oh, the woes of going viral on TikTok.

Another track the crowd sung with fervour rivalling Laus' was 'The Perfect Pair' – rightfully so, as it is the best song on Laus' just-released second album, *Beatopia*. This was also one of the biggest highlights of the set, if only muddied by the strings being drowned out in the mix (unfortunate given how crucial they are to the song itself); Bugden killed it with the plucky, flamenco-esque lead, while Laus' singing was smoky and slick, elevated by Sewell's bold noodling. Fitting, too, was how brightly Sewell shone on 'She Plays Bass' (a song that Laus literally wrote about her).

Laus had her (mostly teenage) crowd eating from her palm on that track, whipping them into a frenzy for its energised salvo. But that could be said for pretty much all of the 18 songs she fit into an impressively tight hour – with two albums and five EPs under her belt (plus 'Coffee'), there simply was no time for any filler. It was notable, however, that although the tour came in support of *Beatopia*, Laus' only played four songs from it – half as many as she pulled from its 2020 predecessor, *Fake It Flowers*.

This felt like one of the set's very few downsides: 'Ripples' and 'Broken CD' could have worked to bring some more atmospheric beauty, while the youthful levity of 'Sunny Day' would've made it the perfect stinger to 'He Gets Me So High', the folky bite of 'Fairy Song' would've shone if it'd been slot between 'She Plays Bass' and 'Dye It Red', and 'Don't Get The Deal' would've ended the set on a truly explosive note. Alas, there are only so many songs Laus can play in one night – until, of course, she starts doing three-hour marathon sets.

Overall, Laus delivered a show befitting of her stature, packed from start to end with hits and made unforgettable with her bubbly, charismatic attitude. It's hard to imagine that her next Australian tour will be so intimate – there's no doubt that Laus has arenas in her future. It doesn't matter where she plays, though, 'cause if all her sets are as good as this one was, you can bet your bottom dollar we'll be there.

# KING STINGRAY

**WHERE** THE CROXTON BANDROOM NAARM/MELBOURNE, VICTORIA | **WHEN** SATURDAY OCTOBER 8TH, 2022 | **REVIEW** ELLIE ROBINSON

2022 has officially been the year of King Stingray. As well as a choice appearance in Australian Guitar #149, the Yolŋu surf-rockers have studded the year with a slew of milestones – the biggest, of course, being the August release of their self-titled debut album. Rolling in at #6 on the ARIA Charts, the LP was met with immediate acclaim – proven by its five nominations at this year's ARIA Awards – and will undoubtedly top most Album Of The Year lists (ours included). Punters got around it like ants on dropped lollies, too, selling out the band's entire tour in support of it within minutes of tickets going live.

We swung around to the first of King Stingray's two Melbourne shows, where by the time Adelaide indie-pop luminary Jess Day had finished her (downright stunning) opening set, the 900-cap Croxton was packed from the stage right back to the merch desk. The headlining act had their crowd buzzing long before their own songs even started, leading rapturous singalongs to Midnight Oil's 'Beds Are Burning' and Wally Johnson's 'Home Among The Gum Trees', then bursting out with a ripping instrumental intro.

It echoed the kind of hype-building you see at arena shows, which makes sense: King Stingray's two core songwriters, frontman Yirrŋa Yunupiŋu and lead guitarist Roy Kellaway, grew up together in the Yothu Yindi touring party. Part of it, though, might just stem from the band's own skint catalogue – they've only released about a half-hour of their own material, so to fill out the full 75-minute set, they leant on extended intros and outros, scattered little jams and plenty of crowd interaction.

One particular chunk in the set's back-end sprawled a mighty 15 minutes, split between an improvised jam twined around Kellaway's speeches to introduce his

PHOTO BY TAMATI SMITH

**SETLIST**

1. ID1 [instrumental intro]
2. Sweet Arnhem Land
3. Raypirri
4. Camp Dog
5. Let's Go
6. Lupa
7. ID2 [new song]
8. Malk Mirri Wayin
9. Get Me Out
10. ID3 [improv jam]
11. Hey Wanhaka

————————

12. Yellow (Coldplay cover)
13. Milkumana

PHOTO BY TAMATI SMITH

PHOTO BY MARC GRIMWADE

bandmates, the chorus and bridge of what appeared to be a killer new song, a call-and-response chant-along where guitarist and yidaki player Dimathaya Burarrwanga taught the crowd how to sing in Yolŋu Matha, and finally another jam that led into 'Hey Wanhaka'. Though super fun, it admittedly stretched out a little ways past its welcome – we'd suggest slimming down the intros and chant-along.

Another new tune came around the set's middle point, sandwiched between the soaring 'Lupa' and energised 'Malk Mirri Wayin', and feeling like a bridge between those songs' unique styles. Notable too is that aside from the rip-roaring 'Raypirri', those tracks were the only ones sung entirely in Yolŋu Matha. There wasn't much of a language barrier, though: Yunupiŋu conveyed the songs' moods and energies perfectly in his performance – and explained their meanings before each one – with his bandmates' controlled chaos gelling effortlessly.

King Stingray performed all but one song from their debut album – the folky and acoustic closer 'Life Goes On' – instead gifting the set's one chilled-out section to their Like A Version cover of Coldplay's 'Yellow'. That was expectedly beautiful (and another massive singalong moment), but it was definitely the band's punchier cuts that proved the most exciting. The mosh sprung to life for 'Raypirri', where Kellaway and Burarrwanga duelled fiercely on their fretboards while drummer Lewis Stiles proved that if he ever gets tired of the Stingray life, he has a bright future in hardcore punk.

Right after, 'Camp Dog' brought the biggest feeling of communal ecstasy, strangers feeling like family as we all belted from the top of our lungs: "Camp dog, please! Please don't bite me!" Therein lied the core of King Stingray's performance – that feeling of unity – as the band regularly made it known how closely notions of home, Country and kinship are ingrained in their music. You could see this in the way the band's five members interacted, geeing each other up when someone tore through a particularly wicked riff or poignant passage on the yidaki. Even bassist Campbell Messer got to shine with a swaggering solo of his own, and he downright stole the show with his slapped rhythm on the ultra-funky 'Milkumana'.

Rare for a band so young, it's truly hard to tell how King Stingray's shows will evolve from here: their entire set was infallibly tight and meticulously paced (without ever feeling rigid or discernibly scripted), and they performed with the kind of ironclad chemistry that's often only galvanised by decades of touring. They bounced off each other with brotherly aplomb, riding their every ebb and flow in perfect sync, and always circling the vibe back to a celebratory one.

Aside from a shorter jam section, there's only one change we'd make to King Stingray's live show: how often they bring it to Melbourne. If it were up to us, they'd hit the stage here at least thrice a month.

# ROCK 'N' ROLL-UPS

**ORIANTHI**'S FIFTH STUDIO ALBUM, *ROCK CANDY*, IS PRETTY DAMN SWEET. THE ADELAIDE POP-ROCKER TELLS US HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

WORDS BY **ANNA ROSE**. PHOTO BY **SCOTT DUDELSON / GETTY**.

It was November 2020 when Orianthi made her grand return to the limelight, dropping *O* more than seven-and-a-half years after she wowed the world with *Heaven In This Hell*. Thankfully, fans needn't have waited so long to get around to the Adelaide pop-rocker's fifth album, *Rock Candy*. The 11-tracker landed last month to well-earned acclaim from her fanbase. Its telling of her spirit as an artist, having minted it in less than two weeks with producer/bandmate Jacob Bunton. In this interview, she tells Australian Guitar how it all happened…

**What was your approach to songwriting for *Rock Candy*?**

Normally you'll write songs over a few years and think, "This will be a good song for the record." But instead of sourcing songs [from a wider catalogue of material], this was more like, "Let's just make it in this time period." [I was writing] what was on my mind at the time and just feeling inspired. It was just me and Jacob in the room, riffing it out.

'Living Is Like Dying Without You', I wrote that song in like ten minutes. I had the title, went into the studio, and we recorded it together, just strumming the guitars in the middle of the room. I think I put two vocal takes down on that one – it was a very live recording. It's very honest and *there*, you know, because I wanted it to be that way.

The perfectionist in me is brutal, I could slave over something for years. But ultimately, this was kind of a challenge because I wanted to put that [rule] on myself and Jacob, like, "Let's make a record this fast and let's write a song a day." We threw ourselves into it, and we had fun doing it, we really did. And we called it *Rock Candy* because it's rock and pop.

**What made you want to lean more heavily on those pop elements?**

I love a good pop song. I've been writing pop songs since I was really young and honestly, we kind of produced it that way because I wanted the verses to focus more on storytelling than aggression. We wanted to have that sort of beat going into it, and for the vocal to be produced a certain way. I think it's all pretty cohesive, but yeah, that song is definitely on the pop spectrum for sure.

I think it's nice to have a bit of variety [in the catalogue] – I get bored, you know? I'm a big fan of country, I'm a big fan of blues, rock, all of that. Really, for me, it's just about how it makes you feel. So with the production, I want it to come across the way it sounds in my mind.

**With Bunton's background as a film score composer, there's an element of theatricality – those big, bold, attention-grabbing sounds. Was it your intention to grip people with an epic kind of sound?**

Honestly, that's a part of my personality. Not to say I'm a dramatic person, but when things hit me – like a breakup – that's frickin' dramatic to me. Getting your heart broken, that's dramatic. That's where songs like 'Void' and 'Where Did Your Heart Go' come from. Those songs were written about [the end of] a serious relationship, and Jacob would match that emotion with how he would score. I guess in those moments, like with the sounds and how we got the guitar tones and the drums and whatnot – and just the feeling of it – I wanted people to sort of feel the same way I was feeling.

**What can you tell me about the guitar you're holding on the cover of *Rock Candy*?**

That's my new PRS Signature Private Stock model. The finish is called Blooming Lotus – it's actually the same colour as my first Jimi Hendrix t-shirt, which was a tie-dyed one I used to wear. I was ten years old and everyone used to walk miles in front of me because it was so bright and crazy. I just thought it was such a cool colour.

It looks kind of like a lotus – there's lotus flowers all down the neck, which is a custom shape with 24 frets – it's a very playable, fast kind of neck, which I really dig. I'm looking at it right now and it makes me very happy to admire. It's like… It kind of goes with *Rock Candy* because I feel like a kid in a candy store when I play it, because it is such a beautiful piece of art, but it also sounds incredible.

I'm very hands-on with everything that I create – especially with all the PRS models I've done, and then the Gibson acoustic that I came out with. That's the one I'm holding in the promo shot, that red one, that's my signature SJ-200 with the 345 neckline.

That was the first time Gibson have done a hybrid acoustic. The necks on the J-200s are usually pretty fat, and I like the playability of them, but I wanted a smaller neck so I was like, "Can I get an electric guitar neck on an acoustic body?" So they followed me down that rabbithole. We made that guitar together a while ago and it's been on backorder for the past, like, two years.

# WELCOME TO THE PAGEANT

ON HIS DEBUT ALBUM AS **PEI**, EX-GANG OF YOUTHS STRUMMER JOJI MALANI WELCOMES US TO A WORLD OF TECHNICOLOUR INDIE-POP. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR TAKES A FIRST-CLASS TOUR.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **HUDSON REED**.

PUBLIC
WEIGHBRIDGE

For much of the last decade, Joji Malani was best known for doling Gang Of Youths their musical bedrock, armed with an ear for theatricality, a fierce will to break the boundaries of genre, and a love for rock 'n' roll at his core. But in 2019 – just when Gang Of Youths became mainstream darlings on the back of their insta-classic second album, 2017's *Go Farther In Lightness* – Malani bid adieu to his chosen family, eager to explore a new direction as a solo artist.

Under the moniker Pei (a Fijian word for "baby"), Malani's new material glimmers with a hint of the charm heard in his work with Gangs – 'Growth' and 'Trying', for example, are both progressive indie-pop songs made epic with operating strings and soaring harmonies – but it shows a breadth he couldn't truly embrace with four other voices to contend with. In allowing his mind to run wild, unrestrained by the opinions of bandmates or the shackles of major label A&R (instead forming his own Broth Records imprint), Malani was able to mine from levels of creativity that not even he knew existed.

Three years into his solo journey, Malani has opened the gates to his wonderland, welcoming us with open arms on the debut album *Pei's Pageant*. And as he tells Australian Guitar, this is just the entry point – there's a whole world of creativity to explore in the mind of Pei, and just as we're excited to see to fruits of it, so too is he excited to unearth them.

**So the songs on this album go from folky to theatrical, with plenty of indie-pop in-between. Was the intent here to really take the listener on a journey?**

I don't think so. I came from a setting, in my previous place of employment, where concept albums were a really big thing – the themes and the lyrics and the music and production, everything was intertwined. But with this album, I wanted to rid myself of that. I'm cheating a little bit, because obviously I've had a career in another band, but I was trying to approach this album like someone who's never made music before. I know that can sound quite contrived, but I guess I just felt like I'd skipped a lot of steps, you know? I didn't get to enjoy that process myself.

I just wanted to try things. There's like a lot of conventional wisdom you pick up along the way – or just stuff you get told, or stuff you can Google – on how to write and record a song. So I just wanted to try everything, even if I knew, "This probably isn't going to work." You know, things like using certain mics, where people would be like, "Oh, you should use this mic, this is the standard mic you use to record a drum." I'd just be like, "Well, I don't know that for a fact."

Most of the time I was wrong, but sometimes we came up with some really cool things. But yeah, I don't want to try to sound like I was super intentional about how the album came about – I was just shooting the shit, really.

**What were some of the biggest things you learned in that process?**

I guess I'd always had an idea of the sounds I was into, or how to layer things properly. In the past, I would just stack so many instruments and so many tracks into a recording. I did that at the start of [the recording process for] this album and Tim would just laugh – he'd be like, "Man, I have never recorded so many tracks in my life!" But I came out of [the process] realising that was a "safety net" thing for me.

'Count To 10' was the last song I wrote for the album, and that song has way less layers than all the other ones. I think 'Count To 10' is kind of where I realised a lot of things about how I write now – realising that I don't need to stack things to make them sound good. It isn't good to worry about that kind of stuff in the mixing stage, either, because it's kind of overwhelming when you get to that... Yeah, I guess that's the main thing – not "less is more", but you know, more is not always better.

**Had you been thinking about going solo for much time before you left Gang Of Youths?**

Yeah, actually – it was definitely on my mind. I always thought I could maybe try to do it while I was still in Gangs, but you know, things happened in my life that caused me to resist taking that leap. And Gangs was quite time-consuming and fulfilling; I felt like I was giving a lot of myself in a way that didn't leave me with much room to do anything else. But for the last few years that I was in Gangs, I just kind of felt that for myself – and what I wanted to achieve, in terms of the big picture – it was going to be hard to do both.

Also, it would have felt cheap for me to do this project on the side... You know, when you're a part of something so great and so big – like Gangs – whatever you do on the side will always be perceived through that lens. Obviously with the first single release, 'Honest', there was that residual stuff from it being, you know, the first thing I do post-Gangs – but since then, it really does feel like people are digesting [the Pei material] as its own separate entity.

**It's gotta feel liberating, too, to really focus your energy into this and go "full steam ahead" as Pei.**

Totally, yeah! And I'm able to be way more intentional about everything. I put this out on my own record label, and I've been doing everything myself – and you know, if I was still a part of my former act, I could rely on a lot of that clout to push and promote it. And people still think it works like that: I was talking to someone recently and they were like, "Man, you're so lucky that you get to do what you're doing off the back of Gangs." And I was like, "Well, actually..."

A lot of it has to do with COVID. I know some amazing, very famous Australian artists in bands, who have put solo projects out and had them not do as well as they could have because of COVID. It just levelled the playing fields – which is sad, but also kind of nice for me, because it helped separate [Pei from Gang Of Youths].

**What are your touring plans for Pei's Pageant?**

There are definitely lots of plans to play lots of shows, but I don't want to just go down the same route and play all the same venues that I did in my last band; I'm trying to revisit things and do it differently. I think you kind of have to in the current climate, too – people aren't going to shows like they were before. They really need a reason to leave the house, right? And so I want to be more engaging with how I present the show, whether that's the venue or the occasion, or who I'm playing with... There's a reason why I haven't done anything yet, and why nothing's been announced.

# A NEW TAKE ON PAST LIVES

**L.S. DUNES** MIGHT COMPRISE MEMBERS OF THE MOST ICONIC BANDS IN POST-HARDCORE, BUT YOU SHOULDN'T DARE CALL THEM A "SUPERGROUP". AUSTRALIAN GUITAR FINDS OUT WHY.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **MARK BEEMER**.

On the surface, L.S. Dunes appears to be the post-hardcore supergroup of our wildest dreams: Anthony Green (of Circa Survive) on vocals, with Frank Iero (of My Chemical Romance) and Travis Stever (of Coheed And Cambria) on guitars, rounded out by Thursday's Tim Payne on bass and Tucker Rule on drums. Their just-released debut album is titled *Past Lives*, and their first live set went down at the epochal Riot Fest – even the most outlandish of fan-fiction writers couldn't make this up.

Catching up with Stever, though, we learned quickly that L.S. Dunes don't really identify with the "supergroup" label – nor any of the stereotypes that come along with it. The band wasn't formed to cash in on its members' individual fame, and although there a glimmers of their signature styles strewn across *Past Lives* – My Chem's melodic angst on 'Like Forever', Coheed's mathy grit on '2022', Thursday's searing bite on 'Permanent Rebellion' – this truly is the work of an outfit galvanised by its own uniqueness.

With love for *Past Lives* dominating the online emo scene, Australian Guitar sat down with Stever to riff a little more on L.S. Dunes' origin story.

**So between the five of you, there's been over 20 projects leading up to L.S. Dunes. When the band formed, did you all feel like you were able to adapt to this new setting easily because of how much you'd done it in the past?**

Well, here's the thing: people are inevitably going to call us a "supergroup" because we come from all these other bands, but we personally hate that term. We jumped into this [new project] because each individual in the band, we needed a place to put our hearts and souls, musically, during the pandemic. And we all knew that we were looking for that – we'd all been in touch, and we had an open dialogue with each other; Anthony didn't come into the game until later on, but we'd known him for years.

Tucker and I had discussed doing something prior to the pandemic, and I've always wanted to work with him. I really have to give a shoutout to our manager, Paul Clegg, who connected all the dots for us – he knew there was a Coheed record that we'd been working on, but I love to be working on music constantly. And a major part of it was having the live setting taken away – not being able to do this thing that had always been such an important part of making music – so all I wanted to do was write.

I still needed a way to express myself. Not to be lame, but it all comes from the heart, you know? I really speak through my instrument, so especially with everything going on, I was looking for a chance to do that again. Because for me, that's the most therapeutic thing – to be able to write and create with the guitar, and turn my emotions into melodies.

**So what was your vision for L.S. Dunes?**

We didn't have one. There was no expectation, it wasn't like, "Oh, well, we all play in these other bands that are pretty well-known, so when we get together and throw some paint at the wall, it's gonna be killer." It was like, "Let's try something new." We all respect each other as musicians, and I think sometimes, in our other bands, we tend to exist a bit more in the shadows. But I think all of us deserve to feel like we've expressed ourselves artistically – freely – so we wanted to give each other a safe place for that, where we could all just throw the paint at the wall and egg each other on to do whatever we felt like doing.

**You mentioned that Anthony didn't come into the fold until later on – when did he jump onboard?**

It was about a month after we started working on a bunch of different songs – maybe even a little longer. Tucker kind of tricked him into doing it. He told Anthony he was just working with some friends, nothing serious, so there was no preconceived notion that he'd have to impress anybody. So Tucker sent him a song – it was the first song we had, 'Antibodies' – and he was like, "Wow, that's actually pretty good!" He sent it back to us with his vocals and we all just agreed, "There's something here."

We all felt so good about it. It became an addiction, sending ideas back and forth, and everybody adding to each other's ideas, egging each other on to take chances... Anthony was like the final piece of the puzzle.

**Did you see L.S. Dunes as an outlet for the ideas you couldn't explore in your other bands?**

Yeah, it's got nothing to do with where anybody came from. And the cool thing is, it's almost like a throwback to our earlier days, when we would all see see each other on tours and be like, "Yeah man, maybe someday we'll work on some music together." You know, everyone says that on tour, but when you really go through with it... And I'm not saying, like, "You can't call us a supergroup!" It's just that to me, this is a f***ing band.

I couldn't be more proud to be a part of Coheed – that's where I come from, you know? There's no way I'd be here, talking to you about L.S. Dunes, if Coheed And Cambria didn't exist. And I don't want to sound cocky or anything, but I feel like I got to play on two of the best records that came out this year. But both of those records, and both of those bands, are equally important to me. L.S. Dunes is way beyond being a "side project".

**I know a lot of this record was written over the web – how many songs did you have in the bag before that first IRL session?**

I'd say we had at least nine of the songs demoed out. It was a very different experience for me. And the way everybody was writing, some of the songs came about in totally new ways for us. Like 'Gray Veins' – which I think ties with 'Blender' as my favourite song on the record – that song started with Tim on the bass. Same with the the title track, 'Past Lives' – Tim sent over the bass part for the main verse, Tucker added a groove, I added some guitar to the verse... And they all really liked this weird kind of tone I got, so Will Yip carried all of that from the demo to the studio recording. And then Frank wrote this banging chorus that comes right out of that.

It was endless. I'd say we had at least 25 ideas that we were working on by the end of [the writing process], and we just picked the nine or ten that we thought were the most solid. The pandemic kind of got in the way of how we'd planned to do it in the studio. I didn't get to go to Will's actual studio – Frank did, and Tucker did all the drums there, but Tim and I ended up doing our parts remotely. But we'd done all the pre-production together, which was helpful. That gave us the time and space to think about what we really wanted to do, and the energy to be like, "Yo, we've got a spark here!"

# TWIN TERRORS

LESS THAN A MONTH AWAY FROM THEIR LIVE DEBUT DOWN UNDER, **NOVA TWINS** TAKE AUSTRALIAN GUITAR BEHIND THE SCENES OF THEIR AUDIO-VISUAL ASSAULT.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **FEDERICA BURELLI**.

We're officially a matter of weeks away from the grand return of the Good Things festival, with its first edition in three years – hitting Melbourne on Friday December 2nd, then Sydney and Brisbane over the rest of the weekend – sporting its biggest and most insane lineup yet. Locked in to headline are Bring Me The Horizon and Deftones, with NOFX (performing 1994's iconic *Punk In Drublic*) and TISM (performing for the first time in 19 years) billed right underneath.

Perhaps the most exciting name on the poster, though, is one a little further down the list: Nova Twins. Unlike any live band you've ever seen, these fire-starting Londoners blend the energy of punk and the riffs of nu-metal with the attitude of hip-hop and the grit of drumstep, delivering an audio-visual assault you're sure to have engraved into your memories for decades to come. Nova Twins' sets at Good Things will be their first-ever in Australia, and they come hot on the heels of the band's incendiary second album, *Supernova*.

Before they make the trek Down Under, Australian Guitar caught up with both members of the pair – vocalist/guitarist Amy Love and bassist Georgia South – to learn a little more about what we can expect from Nova Twins' chaotic stage show.

**So you guys have played a stack of shows since *Supernova* came out – what songs are people vibing the most?**

**Georgia South:** We play quite a lot of the album, actually. I feel like one that's kind of snuck up there is 'Puzzles'. It's inspired by things like '90s R&B, but also the heavier end of the rock spectrum, so we've kind of blended the two to create our version of a sexy Nova rock song. We really bring that element to it live and we have these dance battles with a twerk-off and a mosh-off. Honestly, it's so fun!

**Do you each have your own favourites to play as well?**

**Amy Love:** 'Choose Your Fighter' is a lot of fun to play. And then 'Sleep Paralysis' is a bit of a different vibe for us, and that goes down really well. But 'Choose Your Fighter' is really fun.

**South:** It is really fun, actually. It's a good festival banger as well.

**Speaking of which, what's the vibe like as you gear up for Good Things?**

**South:** We're so excited, aren't we!?

**Love:** Yeah, we're excited! I'm looking forward to catching a bit of summer again – we come out of our winter and hop straight into your summer.

**South:** Yeah, very excited for that. We've always wanted to come to Australia, so it feels great that our first time will be at the Good Things festival. We've got friends on the bill, too, so it'll be a fun week.

**How much do you know about Australia's local music scene?**

**Love:** I don't know loads about the music scene, but we are both really into Sampa The Great!

**South:** Yeah, Sampa The Great and Ecca Vandal.

**Love:** They're both really cool artists – they came over here and we saw them live, and they were both incredible.

**South:** We don't know too much about the scene, but half of my family is from Australia, so I've always wanted to just go and see what the vibe's like.

**Well obviously, y'all are well acquainted with Bring Me The Horizon. Surely you're going to link up for '1x1', right?**

**Love:** We have no idea! I think it depends on their setlist, and if the timings work between our set and theirs.

**South:** We've done festivals together where we haven't played it, so it's not a guarantee. But we'll see!

**When you have played it together, what's it been like?**

**Love:** It's funny, our first time playing it live – and meeting them – was at their arena tour in the UK, and every night, things were going wrong with the boards, or the in-ear packs wouldn't work and we couldn't hear anything. It was literally just stress. So the first few times we played it, it was like, "F***!" But once we ironed out all the technical difficulties, it was great. And then we played it again with them at the NME Awards, at the O2, and that went really well.

**South:** That tour was mental. We came out of the pandemic and went from seeing no one, to suddenly being on this arena tour and playing for 80,000 people every night. We were like, "Wooooooah!" It felt like a movie.

**Love:** It was a lot, but it was the best tour!

**What kind of guitars are y'all swinging around onstage at the moment?**

**Love:** I'm swinging around two Mustangs. One of them is a custom model – it's hot pink, sparkly, with a zebra scratchplate – it's wild. And that's usually what I use for my D tuning, and then for a quick guitar change, my standard's just a plain, like, mauve-ish Mustang. I switch between those two for pretty much the whole sets

**South:** I've got a Westone Thunder 1, which is this Japanese bass from the '80s. They don't make them anymore, sadly, so I just get them secondhand. And then I've got a wicked custom Fender P Bass – it's kind of like the old Telecaster-shaped P Bass, which is very cool.

**Amy, what is it about the Mustang that just makes your heart skip a beat?**

**Love:** For one, the shape – it's very comfortable with my body, and it actually fits around my bust area. Sometimes I find that when guitars are too big, they can feel a bit jarring and uncomfortable. And it's short-scale as well, which is super fun to play. It has P-90 pickups, so it's not as twangy as the original American Mustang – it's actually Mexican, but it's super light. It's got a beefier tone, and it just really works with all the pedals I've got on my board. So yeah, I absolutely love it. I'll try different guitars all the time, but I just always find myself going back to that one.

**And Georgia, what about that Thunder 1?**

**South:** Like Amy said, it's just the one that I keep going back to. It's so heavy, but it just adds to the tone so much. It's made out of, like, four different types of wood. I remember seeing it in my dad's friend's house – I was searching for a bass at the time, and I saw it on his wall and I was like, "What is that!?" I'd never seen anything like it. It's red, it's got zebra stripes on it… I ended up buying it off him for £100, and I've just loved it ever since. It just sounds so fat, it works with all the pedals, it's passive… It's just great!

**Tell me about those pedals! What are the staples on your boards right now?**

**South:** We don't actually like to talk about what pedals we've got on our boards, just because we like to keep it a secret. It's like mama's soup, we like to keep the ingredients to ourselves! Our pedalboards are huge, though – there's a lot of tap dancing onstage. And there's no synths involved live; it sounds like our set is very heavy on synths, but it's actually just us working all the pedals manually.

# A WORLD BEYOND THE GARDENS

JUST A YEAR ON FROM THEIR SECOND ALBUM, **SLY WITHERS** HAVE RETURNED WITH CLEARER MINDS AND CATCHIER HOOKS. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR JOURNEYS THROUGH THE FIERCE ROCK FOLIAGE OF *OVERGROWN*.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **SHANNAN STEWART**.

There was a five-year gap between Sly Withers' self-titled debut and *Gardens*, with the latter album – which arrived last June – presenting a truly reinvented band. Eager to ride its high, the Boorloo-native quartet wasted no time knuckling down on album number three, building on the sentiments explored on *Gardens* for what shaped up to be their first-ever sequel: *Overgrown*.

As implied by its title, *Overgrown* picks up a short while after *Gardens*, when its protagonists – dual frontmen Jono Mata and Sam Blitvich – had gained just enough perspective to answer the questions they posed on their second opus.

And, as is the case with most sequels, the stakes here are higher – *Gardens* was an unexpected hit for Sly Withers, debuting at #10 on the ARIA Charts and taking the band on two largely sold-out national tours. One-upping it wasn't too difficult, though – another benefit of sequels they were able to embrace was the inflated budget; though their first two albums came together in the band's short bursts of free time between tours and day jobs, they were able to spend months dedicated to crafting *Overgrown*.

The end result is Sly Withers biggest and most ambitious effort, taking the ideas presented on *Gardens* and blooming them into an epic showcase of punk-intoned poignancy. Before they take it on the road, Blitvich and Mata gave Australian Guitar a tour of the path they travelled to make it happened.

**In the spirit of sequels, how does *Overgrown* continue the narrative you established on *Gardens*?**

**Sam Blitvich:** I think the biggest thing is that our songs have always been, like, a subconscious form of journaling for us. We're always just tracking our lives through the songs, so in a real simplistic sense, *Overgrown* is a sequel to *Gardens* because that's just the way we write songs.

But I think it's more of a sequel because it approaches the same ideas we were talking about in *Gardens*, but from that perspective of having a few more years under our belts. We've gone from trying to figure out adulthood in our early 20s to figuring out the next stage of our lives with some of those challenges in the rear-view mirror.

**Jono Mata:** I think the "sequel" thing also came about because a lot of the songs started as ideas we were kicking around when we were making *Gardens*. That process of writing never really stopped – we finished [*Gardens*] and then a month or so later, we were back in the studio with another set of demos. So the songs on *Overgrown* were a product of the time we spent in the immediate aftermath of *Gardens* – the time we spent away from home, touring, trying to keep our relationships going and dealing with everything going on in Perth.

**So in that (relatively short) stretch of time, what had you learnt about yourselves that influenced the direction you took on *Overgrown*?**

**Blitvich:** I think a big thing that *Overgrown* looks at, which *Gardens* didn't, is the future. At least with the stuff I was writing about, *Gardens* was more about figuring out how to be an adult, whereas *Overgrown* is a bit more about figuring out how to sustain being an adult, and looking ahead to the rest of my life in a bit more of a "mature" way.

**How did that evolved perspective translate to your songwriting?**

**Mata:** I think there was a bit of a change-up that came about because we had more time to work on it. After we put *Gardens* out, we realised that [songwriting] was something we could take a bit more seriously and turn into more of a "day job" for ourselves. In the past, we'd do it all ourselves [individually] and then we'd bring it to band, and that's when the collaboration would happen. But this time, it was Sam and I working on the first idea for a song together, demoing it, and then taking it to the band from there. So it was a lot more collaborative from the beginning.

I think this is the first time you're going to hear both of our ideas going into a song, rather than one of our ideas coming in and the rest of the band adding to it at the end of the process. And it's interesting because I think our writing styles have always been quite different, but complementary, so working together from the start just meant we could go a bit deeper into the songs.

**Did that make it more gratifying to record as well, knowing that these songs were a closer reflection of who Sly Withers are as a full unit?**

**Blitvich:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Mata:** It was also our first time being in a studio and having the time to strip the songs down and put them back together. In previous sessions, it was like, "Okay, here are the songs that we want to record, let's record them." Everything was demoed out by the time we hit the studio, and then we just made it sound better. But [with *Overgrown*], we had enough time in the studio that we were able to go, "What does the album need? How can we scratch as many itches as possible?"

Going through that process with Dave Parkin was great – it was so beneficial to have someone on the outside being like, "You can do this, you can push for this." So for a lot of those songs, the final product sounds nothing like the original demo that we went into the studio with. And that was a really exciting way to do it.

**Was that an easy process to adapt to?**

**Mata:** There were challenges. You know, you'll have had this idea for a song for 12 months, and then in the first five minutes of recording it, it'll be a complete 180 from where you thought it was going to go. That can be a challenging thing to let go of, but you've got to trust that process. And we were in great hands to do it. I think everyone's attitude was that it was the process we needed to get the best album out of us – it was the right way to do it.

**Blitvich:** And for however challenging of a task it was to dive that deep into our songs, it was equally as exciting. We were all so onboard with the idea of putting a little more time and effort into it, because we wanted to be a lot more deliberate with the recordings, as opposed to just translating whatever happened in the band room while we're writing them.

Jono and I got to spend something like 10 weeks in the studio – five days a week, Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 6pm – just crafting these songs, assembling them and talking about them and making them the best songs we could. There were hard bits, for sure, but it was incredibly exciting and incredibly fulfilling.

**Mata:** Yeah, that was the first time we've been able to do a record where it was the only thing on our minds. And just from having that time – you know, 80-hour fortnights in the studio – we had the ability to go down all these rabbitholes that we normally wouldn't. And then you can still throw away that song at the end of the day and be like, "Well, we've got the time to go down another rabbithole tomorrow." We had way less to be distracted by, so we felt way more comfortable bringing up ideas that we normally wouldn't.

# FULL BLOOM

## ON THEIR GAME-CHANGING FIFTH ALBUM, **SLOWLY SLOWLY** SLAM THEIR DARKEST LYRICS INTO THEIR BRIGHTEST SONGS, MAKING FOR ONE HELL OF A MUSICAL ROLLERCOASTER. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR TAKES IT FOR A RIDE.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **MARCUS COBLYN**.

Pretty much as soon as they'd finished minting their two-part epic *Race Car Blues*, Slowly Slowly were thrust into a whirlwind of personal highs and lows. Like he'd done all his life, frontman Ben Stewart chronicled all of it in song, leading to some of his darkest material yet – but also some of his brightest. Musically, Stewart was inspired by artists like Chaka Khan and post-split Paramore, and this broadened palette offered a stark contrast to his sharp and sobering, melancholic poetry.

In announcing Slowly Slowly's fifth album, *Daisy Chain*, Stewart said that if *Race Car Blues* saw him "wiping the slate clean and trying to reinvent [him] self", then its follow-up "highlights the downfall [he experienced] after that". He admitted that in the pursuit of self-evolution on *Race Car Blues*, he lost sight of what – and who – was around him: "I was so hellbent on my personal development that I had my blinkers on. I think I was a little too self-centred and forgot what's important."

So came a period of re-reinvention, where to move forward, Stewart was forced to reckon with his past and face his demons head on. Not only did he succeed, he channeled the experience into Slowly Slowly's most surprising album to date. As the band start hashing out the setlists for a packed year of touring in support of it, Australian Guitar caught up with Stewart to learn more about how *Daisy Chain* came together.

**Was there a thematic significance, for you, in having the record start on the title track?**

Yeah. That song came pretty late in the piece, and I went through a couple of stages with it. I think originally this was going to be a self-titled record, but then it didn't feel quite right. And then for a while, I was going to call it Papier-Mâché, which is the closing track – but you know, that's a pretty dark song, and I was kind of waiting for that "resolution point" to come around. So when 'Daisy Chain' came along, it kind of just tied everything together.

I think we're probably known for music that errs on the more depressing side of things, but I always fight to have some sort of resolution in all our bodies of work – so I really hoped that something like that was gonna come along [for this record]. And when 'Daisy Chain' happened, I was just like, "That's it!" It's circular – it feels like the resolution to all the issues that had been happening [in the process of making the album], so it's kind of like the bow that ties it all together.

**How did you go about finding the right balance between the rawness of the lyrics and the beauty of the music?**

A lot of the music was written over a super dark period. And I think for the first time ever, because it was so dark, I needed to put [the lyrical themes] up against this shiny, happy exterior because that was the only way that I could work through it – it was almost like I was cloaking it. It just would have been too much to be going through all of this, in lockdown, and then writing the most depressing record ever. I needed to be almost like fooling myself, like dancing around the room while I was writing this super sad stuff. And at the time, when I was writing the music, I felt super inspired by all these new sounds, and that was almost like a distraction from the content itself.

**So how did that translate to the way you approached your songwriting as a musician?**

I think this record is our biggest departure, guitar-wise, from stuff we've done in the past. I wouldn't even call myself a guitarist. I play guitar like a drummer – it's very rhythmic, and I play a lot of open tunings and things that make sense in the moment. I've never had a guitar lesson, so I definitely approach the guitar in my own way. And so I think on our past records, I'd just play block chords throughout a song because that was how I envisaged the skeleton of that song. But for this record, I used bass and drums more to build that skeleton.

I would write a song and I'd have the chord progression set, but then I would take all the guitar chords out of the song and be like, "Okay, now let's start writing guitar parts that complement the arrangement, that aren't necessarily the bare bones, like, structural chords of the song." And I think that helped because I've always had a very self-conscious approach to guitar playing – I don't feel worthy enough to call myself a guitarist. You know, I'd always felt this need to write intricate guitar parts, or stuff that you'd need a knowledge of chord structures or scales to understand. But I realised, making this album, that you don't need any of that. As long as it sounds good, it doesn't matter how complex it is. And so for [*Daisy Chain*], I just took that freedom and ran with it.

**One song that really sticks out for me is 'Turn It Around', where you've got this really swaggering, Strokes-y kind of groove. Where did that come from?**

I drew a lot of inspiration for it from my favorite song of all time, which is 'Ain't Nobody' by Chaka Khan. I think ['Turn It Around'] sounds like this mash-up of the groove from that, and then something in the Venn diagram of Michael Jackson and Incubus – it's f***ing weird, but it works! I just wanted one of those hypnotic grooves, and it all came together from there. It's three chords for most of that song, and yeah, it was an opportunity to put a different hat on and really tap into that swaggery kind of thing.

That super percussive vocal and that little guitar movement, right before the chorus – that's almost like a Jackson 5 chord progression. It was super fun to write. And we deliberately held it back from being a single, just because I feel like there's nothing worse than when a record comes out and you feel like you've heard all the best bits. So ['Turn It Around'] was like my big chocolate cookie crumb – it's my treat for all the die-hards that stay up 'til midnight to hear the record.

**When you look at *Daisy Chain* as this one, cohesive body of work, what do you hope the listener gets out of it?**

I want to help people party through the pain. I didn't want to wallow. I think in the past, I've wallowed, and I didn't want to do that on *Daisy Chain*. I mean, 'Turn It Around' – that song is literally about not being a victim, and taking the onus upon yourself to be more positive. It's like, "You've been kicked in the guts before and you got right back up, so what's another one? You have the powers in your hands, get up and get it done." I wanted to capture that sort of energy.

It's inspired by some of those great records by bands like Paramore. They're able to still carry the soul of what makes them Paramore, but they move it through the full spectrum of emotion. That's the sort of band I want to be – if someone's having a good day, I want them to be able to put on one of our songs and party to it, just as much as I want them to be able to put on one of our songs if they're having a terrible day. And this record, I think, is us trying to step into that light.

# IN THE MIDDLE OF IT

NINE YEARS IN THE MAKING, MAGIC DIRT FRONTWOMAN **ADALITA** HAS RETURNED WITH HER THIRD SOLO ALBUM, *INLAND*. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR FINDS OUT WHY IT'S WORTH THE WAIT.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**.
PHOTO BY **LISA BUSINOVSKI**.

A lot has happened in the nine years since Magic Dirt frontwoman Adalita dropped her second solo album, *All Day Venus*, in September of 2013 – not the least of which being her iconic alt-rock outfit's 2018 reunion. Adalita kept working through it all, though, chipping away on her most ambitious record yet: *Inland*. It brought the Geelong-native iconoclast a punishing amount of stress, but it also proved to be her most gratifying project, described as "a celebration of an inward journey".

On the album's labyrinthine genesis, Adalita said: "It's been a really intense and enlightening few years of exploration into these universal themes of obsessive love, the inner void and reclaiming of the self. I knew when I was writing the songs that they were BIG songs. But it didn't become apparent until I was well into the recording that it was going to be a mammoth task and there were moments when I thought about giving up. I'm very proud of what I've achieved. I also feel an immense sense of relief that it's finally finished."

Ahead of the album's release on December 2nd, Australian Guitar caught up with Adalita to explore the storied journey she went on in crafting *Inland* (and, of course, what Magic Dirt are up to).

**It's wild to think that it's almost been a decade since you dropped *All Day Venus*! When did you start working on *Inland*?**

I pretty much went straight into the songwriting after I [released] *All Day Venus*. Most of the songs were written by the end of 2015 – there were a couple that came a few years later, but the songwriting was all done within in a couple of months. It was really quick!

**So what drew it out into the 2020s?**

It was mostly the recording process. I had problems with things like mapping the tempos – the songs were pretty epic and complex in some ways, so it was just a bit hard to nail them down in the recording. I tried different players, different studios, different methods… So that took up the bulk of the time. And then I was touring and doing all of that stuff in-between; managing the day-to-day takes up a fair bit of time, so there wasn't always a lot of time to work on the record.

Things have changed in the industry, where a lot of artists now have to put on different hats and do a lot of the work themselves, which they didn't have to do before. And you know, budget stuff… There's a whole bunch of stuff that kind of drew it out. I definitely wasn't expecting it to take as long as it did – I was pretty shocked and panicked over that. When I did the first batch of recording, I got the songs back and I went, 'What the f*** am I going to do? I don't have the songs.'

I'd never experienced that in such a big way before, so I had to work really hard [to push through that]. And there were a lot of points where I was thinking of different ways to do the record: "Do I just do an EP? Do I just do it as singles? Do I can the whole thing? Do I start again?" There were a lot of decisions to make along the way, and the decision-making takes up so much time.

**Did your vision for the record stay consistent, or did it kind of evolve in the same way that a person would over a decade?**

It stayed true to my vision for the most part, which I'm glad for – I wasn't sure whether it would. There were a couple of songs that really shape-shifted, though, and that happened when I brought Marty Brown in to produce some of the songs. That was when I was really struggling – I'd tried everything I could think of to get these two songs in the bag, and I thought, "Okay, well, I'm just going to have to run with what I've got." But I wasn't entirely happy.

And then Marty came in and said, "Oh, I've got an idea!" So I just said, "Take it. Just take it, do what you want to do with it." And he did! It was jarring at first because it was quite different to how I would have produced the song, and I wasn't sure how it was going to fit with the rest of the record. But he shifted it into a different form, where it still fit in with everything else, and I was happy with the final result. I resisted at first, but it sort of grew on me. And now it's like… That's how it was always meant to be.

**What was that song?**

The two that Marty worked on were 'Equations' and 'Dazzling'. 'Dazzling' was hard because it's very ballad-y – a lot more ballad-y than I'm used to – and the tempo wasn't sitting right. The original version was quite downbeat and much slower, and I was wavering between, "Should it go much slower, or should it go much faster?" Because the tempo can really determine the mood of the song. But then when Marty took it away, he put a bit more pep into it. And that's when the penny dropped – it was like, "Oh, that's how it's meant to be!"

**So you've noted in the past that, over the last nine years, there were some times where you came pretty close to giving up. What kept the fire burning?**

Well, I hate giving up, and I was like, "These songs need to be heard." I knew that if I did shelve it, I'd always come back to it going, "I wish I'd put this out." I thought [the songs] were just too good to not release. And I could have done them as singles or a little EP, but I guess I am a bit of an "album artist" – I like a good album, and I'd gone so far with it all and invested so much time and so much energy that, yeah, I guess that's what kept me going.

There'd be breakthrough moments, too, and a bit of a light at the end of the tunnel that strung me along – even though it was a lot of false hope along the way. It was a pretty interesting process. It's definitely given me a bit more resilience [as an artist] – I feel like I've got another layer to myself because [making this record] really toughened me up. I'm glad I persevered.

**Did you ever think about reworking the songs into a new Magic Dirt record?**

No, but it's funny you say that – there are some songs I've written, that I thought might be solo songs and I've not thought of Magic Dirt, but very recently, someone brought it up [that those songs could work for Magic Dirt] and I was like, "Oh my god, you are so right!" Like, there are some solo songs I'm writing that don't really suit this thing, and they should be for something else – perhaps they're Magic Dirt songs! So yeah, it's very recently that the light bulb went off there. But no, not this album.

**Has the idea of a seventh Magic Dirt album come up since you reunited?**

It's something we've spoken about, but moreso in the sense that we've acknowledged that people have brought it up. We've got a lot of people asking, "Are you doing a new record?" But we'd never thought about it. I guess it's something that is just now floating around in our periphery. We've not spoken about any recording or writing or anything like that, but it definitely is this little "thing" that's just sitting over there… ag

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# THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

**DEVIN TOWNSEND** IS BACK AT HIS THEATRICAL BEST, PRESENTING HIS MOST REFINED SELF ON *LIGHTWORK*. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR TAPS INTO THE BRIGHTNESS.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **PAUL HARRIES**.

If there's one thing we've learned over the past three years, it's that everyone dealt with the pandemic in their own ways. Some artists wandered deep into the void and made their darkest records yet; some chose to embrace the calm and unlock their inner zen; some leaned into the chaos, or went ultra-pop as a form of escapism, or ignored the shifts in mood entirely, or chose not to make new records at all. Ever the man of a million thoughts, Devin Townsend couldn't settle for just one option.

The omnipotent prog-metaller wrote hundreds of songs over the COVID era, siphoning material into different categories. The more chaotic songs were bundled into *The Puzzle*, while those a little more serene went into *Snuggles*. Both albums arrived last December, accompanied by films (and in the former's case, a graphic novel), paving the way for one of Townsend's all-time biggest musical epics: *Lightwork*. Coupled with an ancillary album of B-sides titled *Nightwork*, the ten-track opus follows Townsend on a sprawling journey through sound, as effervescent as it is profound.

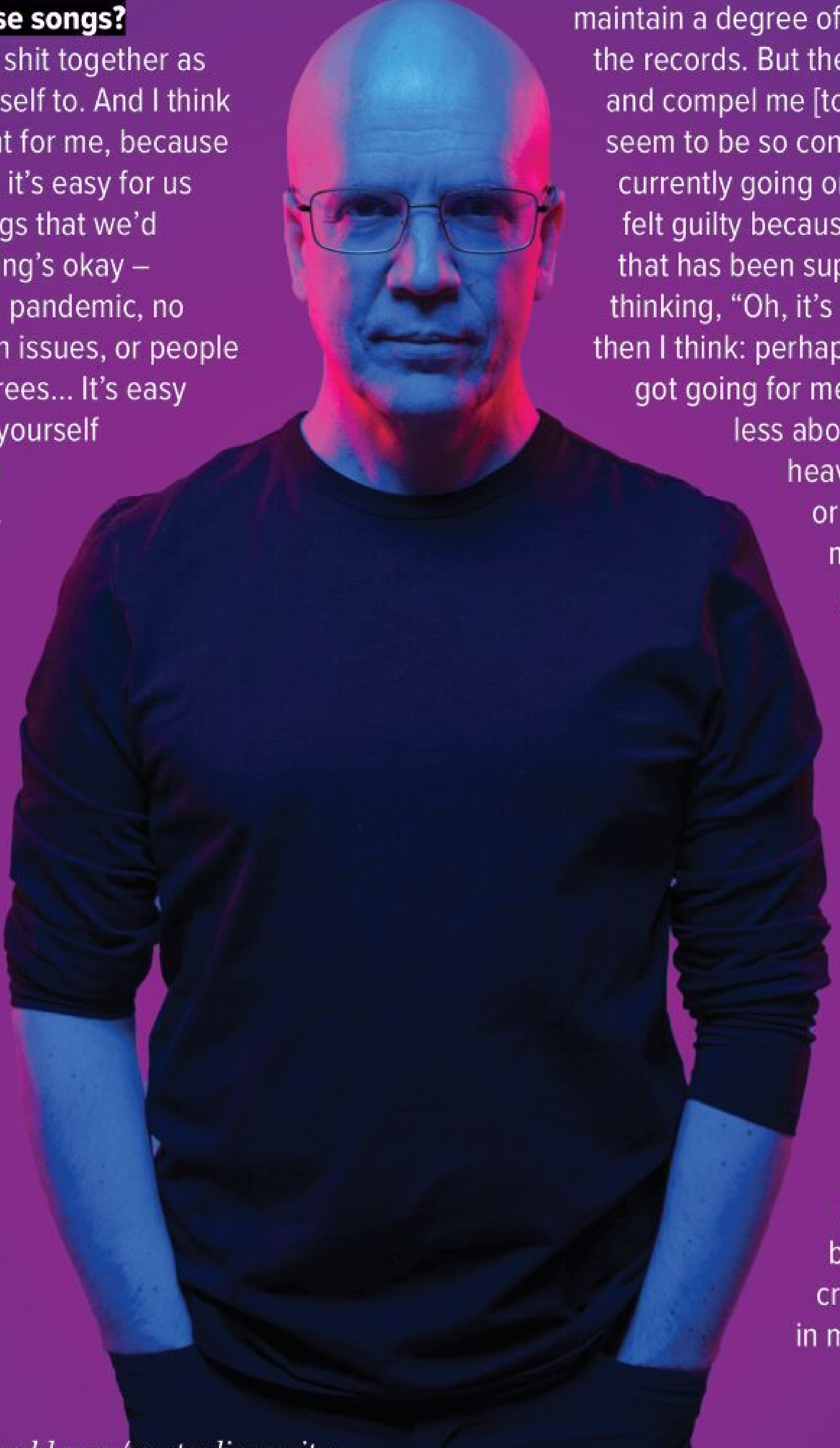
With his sights set on touring it all throughout 2023, Australian Guitar caught up with Townsend to explore the mind-bending radiance of *Lightwork*.

**What did you learn about yourself in the process of writing these songs?**

That I didn't have my shit together as much as I presented myself to. And I think that was really important for me, because I think that in a vacuum, it's easy for us to to be all of these things that we'd like to be when everything's okay – when there's no war, no pandemic, no financial issues or health issues, or people suffering to certain degrees... It's easy at that point to present yourself as this idealised version of what you'd like to be. But over the past two years, I've really had to come to terms with the fact that who I actually am is a lot less like that.

In certain scenarios, I reacted in ways that were surprising to me both in positive and negative ways. And for a while there, I was a little bummed. I was like, "Man, I wish I was more balanced than I clearly am." But by the end of it, I was actually really thankful for that. Because to actually be honest with yourself is a real gift in a lot of ways. And how that manifested for me was just being a little easier on myself. Because for so many years, I've been a real perfectionist and really disciplined, but only on the surface – underneath, I was really hard on myself about a lot of things.

But I've sort of made peace with that, like, "Dude, you are who you are, and you are where you are... And that's cool." It was really inspiring, but also kind of humbling in a way. It was good for me though, ultimately, to see myself for who I am as opposed to who I thought I was.



**Do you find songwriting to be a helpful tool in helping you navigate the labyrinth that is your mind?**

It's a coping mechanism, for sure. I think it's only recently that I recognised that function – and maybe a part of that [realisation] came from the 'Lightwork' record. So much of what I do on social media, prior to releasing a record, is make apologies for it. Maybe there was part of me that was still attached to the fact that there's a certain faction [of followers] out there who want me to be what I was in the past – whether that's Strapping or Empath or Deconstruction or Ocean Machine...

I was always confused as to why I couldn't maintain a degree of consistency throughout the records. But the things that inspire me and compel me [to write music] always seem to be so connected to what's currently going on in my world. I always felt guilty because I've got an audience that has been super supportive, and I'm thinking, "Oh, it's not like it was." But then I think: perhaps the biggest thing I've got going for me as artistic collateral is less about consistency, or being heavy, or being this or that or some other thing, but more that it's like... I've got no choice but to follow these things wherever they want to go.

Once I started recognising that pattern, I was like, "Dude, why are you always apologising for this shit? You did your best!" And that's the criteria that this art needs to have, above all other things. If I can truly say that I did my best, and I managed to create something that, in my mind, represents something that was important to me – that maybe other people can participate in – then we're good. And to the people that want it to be something other than what it is... I mean, that sounds like a "you" problem.

**I think moreso with this album than ever, you've really mastered this equilibrium of energy and melancholy, where any one song can sound intense, but at the same time almost tranquil. How did you crack that?**

I think you're just tied to your nature, you know? It's the same reason why dogs are weirded out by me and cats like me. I think I'm a pretty tranquil person, but [that tranquility] is mixed with this constant undercurrent of anxiety or intensity. And I think making peace with that was a big part of it.

Going back to the personal revelations: I think it's easy to chastise ourselves for not being what we'd like to be. Like, I'd love to be just totally zenned out, but I'm clearly not, right? I've clearly got lots of things going on in [my mind] that create this weird kind of thing. But I'm at peace with that. It's okay to be chill, but also not chill. And so, as a reaction to who I am at any period in time, I don't think about music at all – I just write. And there's a guitar next to me right now, there are guitars on the wall over there... I'm always writing, and as a result of that, my songs go hand-in-hand with whatever's going on.

**Reading through the list of people you worked with on *The Puzzle* and *Snuggles*, it's like a playbill of incredible guitarists, from Steve Vai to Plini to Markus Reuter... Did you link up with many heavy-hitters on *Lightwork*?**

Mike Keneally played on *Lightwork* because I love the guy and he's a good buddy, and I love the fact that he's always down to play a solo. I'm a good guitar player, I think, I rarely want to play solos. I think that part of doing interviews, and having done this for so long, is that you're always subject to the scrutiny of others, and people are able to assume that things like [not wanting to play solos] are indicative of a certain personality trait. Like, throughout the years – especially when I was less secure in myself than I am now – people would say, "Well, the reason why you don't like playing solos is because you feel self-conscious."

For a while there, I was like, "I wonder if that's it." But I think it might be more simple than that. It's just like, "No, I just don't really want to play solos." That's it, right? And it's not like I won't – look at Deconstruction, I played tonnes of solos all over that record – but I only play them when it feels important. And then if there's a section that I feel needs a solo, and when I try it I'm just bored of everything I do, I'm fortunate to have all these really incredible players in my world. I can just call someone up and be like, "Man, I can't come up with anything that doesn't piss me off here. Could you try?" ag

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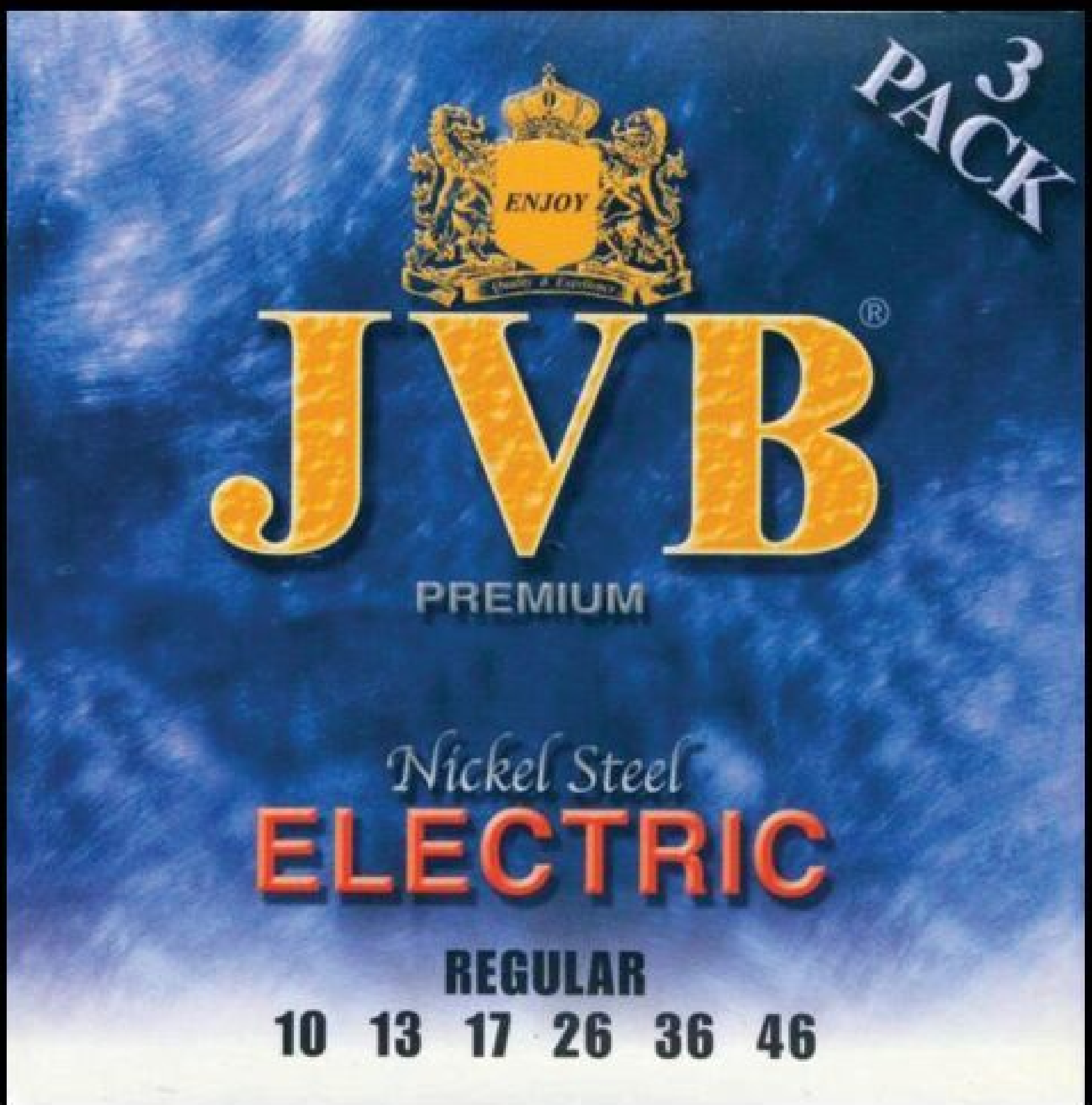
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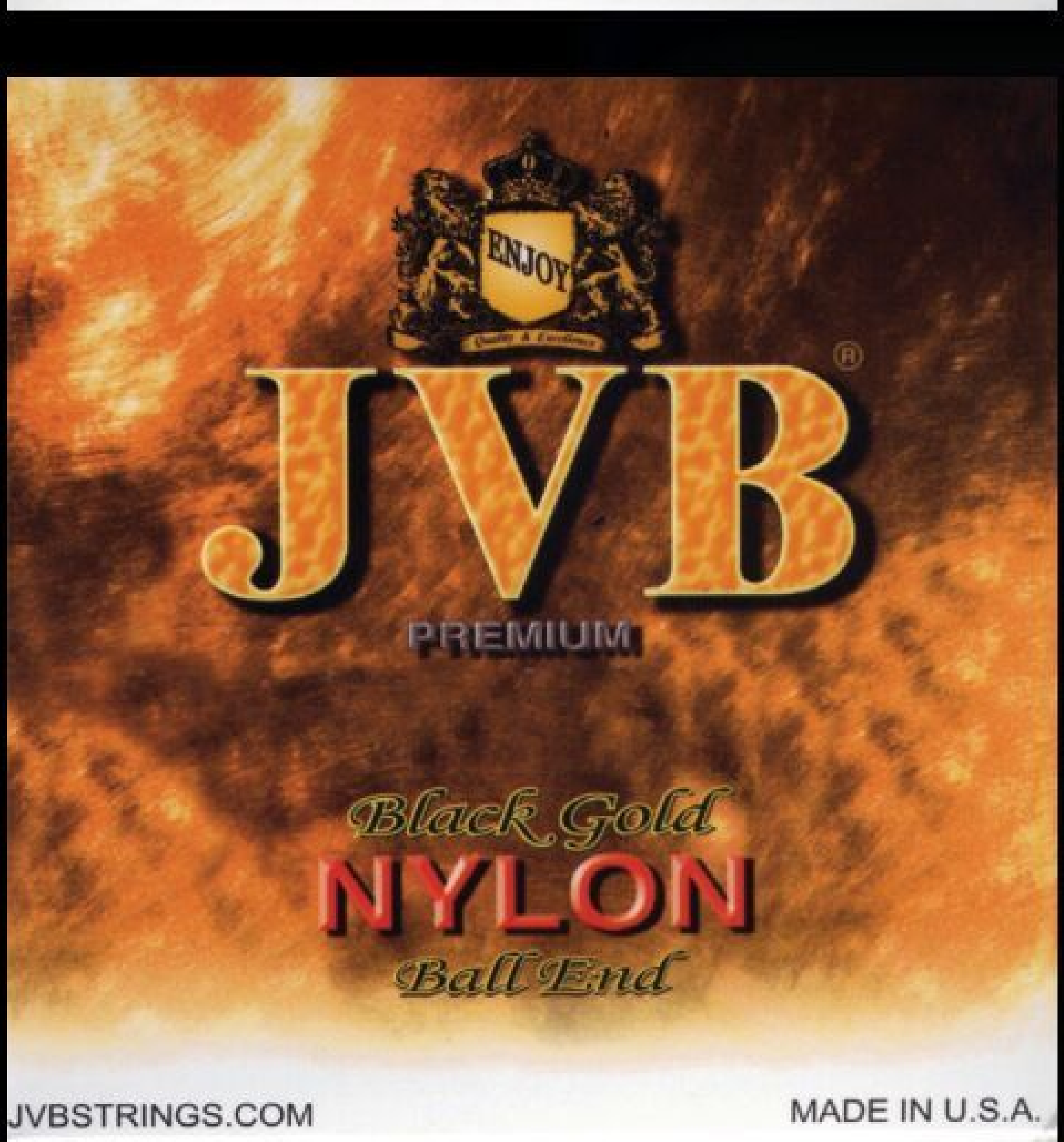
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# GOOD VIBES, GOOD TIMES

AUSTRALIAN GUITAR GETS GROOVY WITH THE KINGS OF CRUISE-ROCK, **OCEAN ALLEY**.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **THE SAUCE**.

Just in time for summer, Ocean Alley have returned with their fourth studio album, *Low Altitude Living*. Named in tribute to the sandy shores they call home, the album offers some of the Sydney sextet's most soulful and swaggering tunes yet, proving them undefeated as the kings of cruise-rock. Before they hit the road for the world tour to end all world tours, Australian Guitar cracked a couple of verbal tinnies with lead guitarist Angus Goodwin.

**How did you want this record to really embrace what Ocean Alley is in 2022?**

I guess we just went in the direction that felt right for us. Over the whole of COVID, we were spending a lot of time at home and around where we live, and the record kind of revolves around that, I guess – just the feeling of being at home, that's pretty much what inspired it.

**Especially with this album coming together in the time that it did, being able to really embrace that flow state and spend a little more time just living with the songs, did you find yourself experimenting with many new techniques or playing styles?**

Yeah, I mean, having so much time not touring, you're doing a lot more practice at home and trying to work out new things. I was spending a lot of time on YouTube, learning licks from guitarists that I like and trying to work on some new techniques. It's fun to put them into the new songs. [It's] something different, more challenging.

**Who were some of those guitarists you were influenced by?**

Just a few YouTube guitarists like Mateus Asato and Tyler Bryant; that blues-rock lead guitar sort of stuff.

**I don't think it's an overstatement to say that this record has some of your best guitar work. Like on 'Parking Fines', the way that real buzzy lead part gels with that wailing lick, it's like the musical equivalent of taking your first sip of coffee in the morning. Where did that song come from?**

I think Baden had that one – he'd written that at home, and then we all got together, and we kind of put all our own parts on it. I just played slide on that, and I felt like that kind of worked. There's three guitars, so a lot of the time, if it's feeling like it's quite busy with guitars, I'll go to slide to kind of add something different.

**Is it a bit of a balancing act to like make sure you're not overcrowding a track when you've got three guitarists in the band?**

Yeah, you've just got to work it out and fit in where it fits, I guess. We're definitely conscious of trying to give each other space and play things that complement each other's guitars.

**So right after 'Parking Fines', we've got 'Changes', which is a total 180 from what we've come to expect from Ocean Alley. What was it like to momentarily become a '90s grunge band for that song?**

That was really fun. It's definitely completely different to anything we've ever done before. But I mean, it's exciting to play different sorts of genres. And it's not that we were really going for that – it just kind of evolved that way, I guess. You have one lick that sounds that sort of way, and you follow it down that road and it kind of evolves into a whole track, which sounds completely different to what we usually do.

**Is it a gratifying exercise, for you, to explore those sounds and ideas that you normally wouldn't?**

Yeah, it's nice to explore those sounds. I guess it allows you to play differently as a guitarist, if you're playing those different sorts of genres. I got to do a solo at the end of that track, which was a lot of fun, but I wouldn't really be able to do that on a lot of our other songs.

**Are you exited to rip that solo live?**

Yeah! I mean, I'll probably have to go back and relearn it – I haven't really played it since I did it, but yeah, nah, for sure. I'm excited to play all of these new songs live!

**The other song I wanted to vibe on is 'Snake Eyes', because I feel like that real cruisy, almost sort of reggae groove, with the wah stealing the spotlight there – it's definitely a highlight. What can you tell me about that one?**

That was another one of Baden's ideas. We had an Airbnb where we met up for a week and wrote a bunch of the songs, and that was one of them. And yeah, once again, we just went down that road with it once we had that chord progression. It's nice to just try and write something different. I think diversity is what we were going for on this album – maybe not completely intentionally, but yeah, by the end, it felt like all the tracks were quite different.

**What kind of guitars were jamming up a storm on for this record?**

The majority of it was done on my '60s reissue Strat. And then on the heavier ones, for things like 'Changes', I was using my Gibson SG. And then I've just got a Tele that's set up for slide, so all the slide songs were done with that.

**What is it about that Strat that just makes your heart skip a beat?**

I don't know. For a lot of the albums we've done, I've kind of mixed up my guitars – it almost makes you play a bit differently. I played on my Les Paul a lot on the previous albums, but I just love the sound of a Strat, so I wanted to use it a lot for this record.

**What about in the way of pedals and effects?**

The other boys have much more complicated rigs. I pretty much just use an analog delay, a chorus and a compressor. I'll use a wah occasionally, too. I guess I just strive to have a nice, clean sound with a good bit of delay and chorus.

# THE DELUSIONAL FUTURE

ON THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, **ELIZA & THE DELUSIONALS** RECKON WITH THE CHAOS OF THE PRESENT BY EMBRACING THEIR PASTS. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR JOINS THEM FOR A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **LUKE HENERY**.

*Now And Then* is an apt title for Eliza & The Delusionals' debut album, blending the shimmer and pomp of modern-day production with the bubblegum blitheness of '90s indie-pop. Channeling cassette-tape classics like The Blue Nile, The Cranberries and Alanis Morissette, Eliza Klatt and co. bring the Limewire'd playlists of their youth into 2022 with a keen ear for the crisp and the cool – thanks in no short part to the soul-warming strums of guitarists Kurt Skuse and Tex Martin.

Most of *Now And Then* came to life in Skuse and Klatt's home studio, but that wasn't the plan: since their breakout in the mid-2010s, Eliza & The Delusionals have become a staple of the North American indie circuit, and before the pandemic hit, they were eyeing off a permanent relocation to LA. Alas, the world had other plans, and the band's debut grew to become more of a homely affair.

But it was all the better for it: as Klatt said in announcing the album, it "was the best thing to come out of the pandemic for us. We had just dealt with a huge loss of all of our touring in America, and when we got back to Australia we both were feeling quite lost and sad. We took the opportunity to build a studio at home and bunker down and turn all of the feelings that we had been experiencing for the past two years into songs."

With the record high on our shortlists for Album Of The Year, we caught up with Klatt and Skuse to dig a little deeper into the story behind Now And Then.

**We can't talk about this record without touching on those big, bright, soaring '90s pop-rock vibes. What is it about that nostalgic flair that really butters your muffin?**

**Eliza Klatt:** It kind of happened naturally for us, because we grew up listening to so many bands from that time period. I think they're subconsciously our favourite styles of guitar playing and tones, and we naturally lean towards that sort of thing. It's always a hard question about making it our own, because we don't really think too much about it – it kind of just comes to life with our songwriting and our preferences on production!

**The tonal palate on this record is magical – it hits this stunning sweet spot between these glittery, synthy dream-pop moods and this grungy, dirty indie-rock flair. How did you find that perfect balance?**

**Klatt:** When we were demoing for the record, we knew we wanted to do something different with our sound. Kurt has a strong love for synthesisers, which is something I'd personally never really messed around with, so I think having that aspect in the writing and demoing process was really cool. It was a whole new thing we could use to create textures and melodies with, instead of just the guitar. We still wanted to stay true to our big guitar sounds in some form, but adding the synth in and using it for some of those underlying melodies, it was really refreshing and brought something new to our sound for sure.

**How did you want this record to build on what you'd established with the *Objective Reality* EP?**

**Klatt:** It's kind of weird because [that EP] was such a turning point for us, but I feel like we didn't get to really experience its release because it came out at the beginning of the pandemic, and the songs were written a few years prior to recording it – so I think we were honestly just ready to move on.

*Now And Then* was also a big collaboration between myself and Kurt, which was new, so I think it was always going to sound different, and like the next progression or era of Eliza & The Delusionals. Our headspaces were also so different to where we were when the EP was written and recorded, so I think the album was very distant from it.

**This record has been described as "the perfect soundtrack to [E&TD's] coming-of-age period". How did you endeavour to condense your halcyon days into one all-encompassing, 40-minute musical journal?**

**Kurt Skuse:** It was honestly just a culmination of different emotions splayed over a two-to-three year period. Eliza and I had been writing and knew we wanted to do an album, but didn't quite know the timeline as we had a bunch of touring [lined up across] the USA. It wasn't until the pandemic hit and we were forced to come home that reality started to set in.

We were all struggling mentally – quite a lot, to be truthful. The silver lining through the shit was that this was ultimately where the album was born; the overall concepts, themes and aesthetics really developed in this time, as we immersed ourselves into the writing process and sunk our teeth into the idea of a nostalgic escape. Lots of reflection in this time allowed us to not have to sit still and watch the world burn, and really shaped how the album came to be.

**How did you find that *Now And Then* offered you a cathartic outlet?**

**Skuse:** Speaking truthfully, it's probably not until now that I can look back on the last few years and reflect on what we did without hating the thought of it. It was such a rough time, mentally, the whole world was burning down and everything felt so bleak. I was extremely lucky to have Eliza to help me through in that period of time.

The album itself was such an outlet – and realistically, the only one we had at the time – which is why I think it feels very personal. We set out to create a world that we felt comfortable in; somewhere we could escape, that would take us back in time to certain points of our lives, for no other reason than because it felt right and gave us some form of solace. *Now And Then* literally runs in chronological order of the events Eliza and I have been through growing up, all the way up to the closing track, 'Now And Then', which pretty much summed up life for us at that specific time.

**So you spilt the recording between Airlock Studios, Konstantin's joint and your home studio. Did you find those sessions – and the material that came out of them – to be particularly unique?**

**Klatt:** 95 percent of the record was written in our home studio, so I think a big part of the feeling and vibe was initiated there. I think it was because, like most people at the time, we were forced to stay home. We kind of forgot about the outside world. We were submerged in feelings and inspired by memories in that studio. I love that we did all of the recording at Kon's studio, because it felt refreshing to be out of our house and creating in a different musical space.

**Skuse:** Being able to jump into Kon's space is always great – he really is the best, and Eliza and I always feel super inspired in his presence. That's where we did most of the guitars and vocals. Once we knew we were going to do the album in Australia with Kon, we knew we would being using Airlock to track drums: Ian Haug, who owns the studio, has always made us feel welcome, and at this stage in our career it really does feel like a home away from home.

# CHASING THE HUM

**THE WONDER YEARS** HAVE OFFICIALLY PEAKED WITH *THE HUM GOES ON FOREVER*, AN ALBUM CHRONICLING A DECADE AND A HALF OF DETERMINED GROWTH. AUSTRALIAN GUITAR GETS THE LOWDOWN ON IT.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **CHRISTOPHER KITCHEN**.

Few bands have cultivated the same kind of reverence as The Wonder Years. The band cut their teeth on jokey pop-punk jams they're admittedly embarrassed by, but over nearly two decades, they've grown into one of the most venerable forces in emotionally charged alternative music. They'd long stuck true to their pop-punk roots (albeit with increasingly darker tints), but on 2018's *Sister Cities*, the band shed it entirely to explore a more strait-laced emo and post-hardcore sound.

Though polarising for some, that one-off musical detour proved incredibly beneficial for The Wonder Years. They've returned to pop-punk for their just-released seventh album, *The Hum Goes On Forever*, but they've done so with a matured perspective and poise that shows the band in their strongest form yet. It's led to their most surprising material – the pseudo-gothic 'Songs About Death' and soaring 'Laura & The Beehive' among its biggest highlights – which, as frontman Dan Campbell tells Australian Guitar, is a direct testament to the band's constantly evolving ethos and chemistry.

This is the new age of The Wonder Years, driven by a staunch determination to make you feel every feeling physically possible. Having just unleashed *The Hum Goes On Forever*, we sat down with Campbell to learn about how it came to be.

**So on *Sister Cities*, you kind of stepped away from that pop-punk vibe. What drew you back to it for *Hum*?**

Well, I think it's more about why we left it for a moment. With *Sister Cities*, we didn't want to do something that stood in opposition of our past work, we just felt like we'd reached a lot of limits of where we were allowing ourselves to go. And so we thought, like, "Let's force ourselves to push past those limits." I've given like 100 bad metaphors for this, so here's one of those: we had this set of tools that we were really adept at using, and we had gotten so adept at using them that we felt like it could become rote and formulaic to keep using them.

We wanted to avoid that, so we said, "Let's throw out all these f***ing tools and figure out how to use some new tools." We went to a new producer, we looked at every aspect of the songwriting process differently, and we said, "What can we learn from this?" And I think we made a tremendously cool record – I f***ing love *Sister Cities*, I still think it's got some of the best Wonder Years songs in the catalogue on it. But it wasn't supposed to be like a fork in the road, it was supposed to be a thing that we could learn from.

And so when we got to making *Hum*, we said, "Okay, let's think about the band, let's think about who we are, and let's think about everything we're capable of doing. Then, let's try to narrow in on what we think we do, frankly, better than anyone else. What do we think we're the f***ing best at? Now, let's go do that."

**I think that made for a better album in the end – there's so much stuff on *Hum* that I don't think you could've done if you hadn't made a record like *Sister Cities*.**

Yeah, I mean, we had to push past our boundaries – we had to push ourselves outside of our comfort zone – to get better. That really was the whole thing. If I'm being frank, I think of this record as a triangulation of our three most recent records: I think it's part *Greatest Generation*, part *Sister Cities* and part *No Closer To Heaven*.

**Ever since Fall Out Boy did that one song that referenced all their old hits and then broke up a year later, I'm skeptical whenever bands get nostalgic about themselves. This isn't some roundabout way of telling us that *Hum* is The Wonder Years' swansong, right?**

I would say we've always been self referential, right? So that's not a new piece of evidence that you have in this Charlie Kelly pinboard thing. But as far as it being the last record… Every record of ours could be our last record, because we don't want to release bullshit. That's been a very real thing for us – we only want to put out records that respect our fanbase and respect our legacy.

Every time you go into a new Wonder Years record, you should walk out of it going, "This is a contender for the best Wonder Years record." And if we don't feel that way about it when we're making it, we're not going to put it out. I don't think I'll ever reach a point where I go, "Yeah, I don't know, we finished the record, and I think it's probably our third- or fourth-best one… Still pretty good, right? Here you go." I feel like that would be a disservice to everything we've built, and to the people we play for – for whom we have a lot of respect.

**When you're writing a song, do you think much about what Matt, Casey and all the other guys are going to play on it, or do you kind of just let them bring their own flavours into the mix?**

I generally try to go into [the songwriting process] with the trust that, like, they are all very talented and will do a great job with it. When I wrote 'Low Tide', for example, I was just writing on an acoustic guitar, playing the chords you learn at the first-ever guitar lesson you take. It was a G chord, an E minor… Very, very simple shapes. Because I know that what [the other members] are going to do to it is going to add that colour and texture, and make it more Wonder Years-y than I ever could. I play the guitar, but I am definitely not the guitar player for The Wonder Years.

**Tell me the story behind 'Songs About Death'. Musically, at least, it feels like a massive leap into uncharted territory for The Wonder Years – which is saying something when you consider the entirety of *Sister Cities*.**

That's kind of an interesting story. So it did start with me, but not as a song – I wrote it to be the bridge of 'Old Friends Like Lost Teeth'. That song was supposed to go from the second chorus into 'Songs About Death', and then 'Songs About Death' was supposed to be about half as long; it was just going to be the end of 'Old Friends Like Lost Teeth'.

We played it that way a couple of times, and there were two prevailing sentiments about it – the first being, "This is very cool," and the second being, "We're shooting ourselves in the foot by not doing a third chorus on 'Old Friends Like Lost Teeth', because that's such a good chorus." So we were like, "Well, what do we do?" And Nick just went, "I don't understand why ['Songs About Death'] can't just be a song.' And I said, 'Well, it's only these two parts," so he said, "Well, just do them again."

For a long time, we just called it an interlude. We weren't even calling it a song. But then it just kind of kept growing, little by little, until we were like, "Holy shit, this thing's like three minutes long – this is a song now!"

But I mean, that was one where what I was playing was so basic – it was such a simplified version of what's on the record. But the great thing about working with these guys is that we've all been writing songs together since we were 17, so I went in[to the studio] and I was like, "Hey, I want something like this, but like, not this" And I kind of played it for them and sung it for them, and Nick was like, "I know exactly what you're trying to do, it's this thing, and I'm going to do it 100 times better than you ever could."

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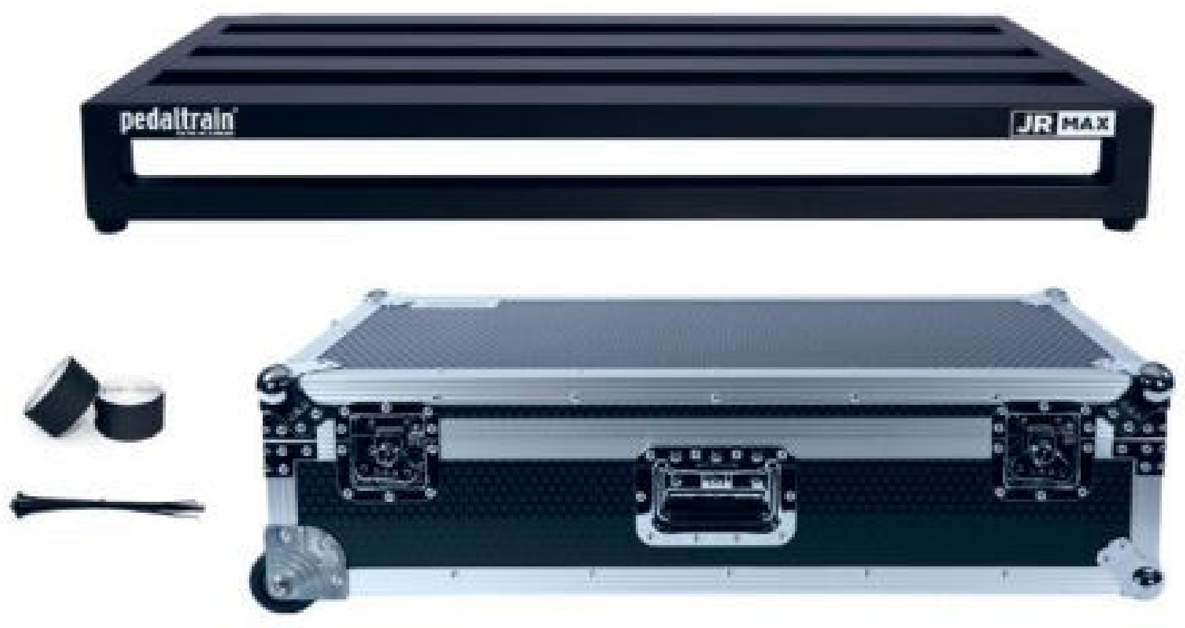

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# BIGGER AND BETTER

JUST A YEAR AFTER DROPPING THEIR "COMEBACK" ALBUM, **BIG SCARY** HAVE ALREADY WHIPPED UP ANOTHER – AND THIS ONE, THANKFULLY, SEES THEM BRING THE GUITAR BACK.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **NICK MCKK**.

Around the middle of 2017, Big Scary seemed to be on the cusp of a hard-earned mainstream breakthrough: their third album, *Animal*, charted at #5 at the end of the year prior – and earned frontman Tom Iansek an ARIA nod for Producer Of The Year – and the band were comfortably selling out theatres across the country. But after their second time playing Splendour In The Grass in July '17, their hype train came to a screeching halt. Cue years of radio silence, while Iansek kept the dream alive in other projects.

Big Scary reconvened at the dawn of the new decade, writing some two dozen songs that saw them freed from the pressures of success – Iansek and drummer Jo Syme weren't gunning for that breakthrough anymore, and instead made music because… well, that's what they loved doing. Their "comeback" album, 2021's *Daisy*, marked a seismic shift in Big Scary's musicality, swapping soft-rock for indie-pop with glittering synths that filled hypnotic soundscapes. So swept up in the haze, it wasn't until they had *Daisy* in the bag that Iansek realised he hadn't played a single guitar on it.

No sweat; just a little over a year later, Big Scary have delivered yet another new album, truly making up for all that lost time with *Me And You*. It represents the ultimate form of Big Scary, both musically and behind-the-scenes, with Iansek and Syme splitting all songwriting, performance and production duties equally. And yes, the guitars have returned! To celebrate, we sat down with Iansek and unpacked the genesis of *Me And You*.

**So what drew you away from the guitars on *Daisy*, and what drew you back to them for *Me And You*?**

It wasn't a conscious thing. We'd mostly grouped the songs together by feel, and then it was only after the fact that we realised that there were no guitars on *Daisy*. But then I was similarly pleased to notice that there were some guitars on *Me And You*. I guess the songs on *Daisy*, they were very sort of synth-driven, and they kind of wanted to live together.

It was interesting in a way because when we came back to Big Scary, after our hiatus, it felt like a new beginning. Where the guitar had been such a pillar of Big Scary's sound in the past, I guess it was kind of nice that it wasn't there all of a sudden. It tied into there being new parts to this old project – something new or different that we didn't have in Big Scary before we took that break.

**Did you find that, having done *Daisy* without any guitars, you were able to approach the instrument with a new perspective for *Me And You*?**

Well, it was interesting because we wrote this one big batch of songs after we came back together, and included in that were all of the songs from *Me And You*, all of the songs from *Daisy*, and some other songs as well. We didn't really know how they would be grouped together at that stage, or what was going to happen with them – it was only later down the track that we organised the tracklists for these two albums and I noticed, "Oh, *Daisy* has no guitars on it!"

But you know, when we picked up our instruments again after all those years, we just sort of did what came naturally to us. We made a point of not overthinking anything, not putting any sort of restrictions on ourselves, and not injecting [into the process] any sort of fear or worry over what it might look, sound or feel like. We just wanted to play and make music, you know? And having done that for so long already, it felt very natural to just pick up a guitar jam. And that's what we did – we just jammed and played around and wrote some songs.

**How did that looser, more free-flowing attitude shape the kind of songs you were writing?**

Our mental ethos definitely played a big part in how the songs came together. And tied in with that is our personal circumstances – where we're at as a band, and also where I'm at as a producer. You know, I'd been working as producer for all the years [that Big Scary was on hiatus], working with other bands, and so that all had an impact on what we were doing.

I think some bands find it hard to write when there's lots of pressure on their shoulders – those fears and worries tend to weigh it down because you feel like you're you're making a record more for other people than you are for yourself. And we definitely felt a little bit of that pressure just before the band stopped. I mean, that was a hard thing to do in itself: the year we [went on hiatus], we'd just done really well in the Triple J Hottest 100, and the band was playing the biggest shows it ever had. But then, having not made any music together for years, all of that pressure sort of just died away.

There were sad bits to letting some of that momentum go, but creatively, it was a really wonderful thing. We found that we were making music just for the fun of it, with no agenda. It reminded us a lot of when we first started the band, when we 19, 20 and just mucking around, making sounds in our parents' living rooms. And you know, having that energy when you're making music, it definitely flows over into all the creative decisions that you make. We were asking ourselves, "Well, what does this song need?" Rather than, "What does this song need in order for us to feel like the band we need to be?"

That also happened to be where I am as a producer as well. It's like, you have to hold these songs with just the right amount of pressure – if you hold on too tight, you can kind of strangle it. I don't know where I heard it, but someone gave me this analogy where if you're holding a golf club with all your strength, you're gonna be too stiff, and you'll just hit a terrible shot. You have to hold it just loose enough to get the swing right – and I think in terms of making music, that also rings true.

**Speaking of swinging things around, what did your guitarsenal look like for this record?**

I had this beautiful custom guitar made by an Australian luthier at T Guitars. He basically made me the guitar of my dreams a few years ago, and I used that whenever an electric guitar was called for. We go to Phillip Island to write and we can't take everything with us, so I just packed the T guitar because it sort of just does everything I want to do with a guitar most of the time. And so all the guitar songs were written on that.

I'm sure you know the feeling: when you write a song on one guitar and that becomes a part of its sound, it's hard to let go. And so it was mostly just the the T guitar that I used, always pretty clean, through Fender amps. But I also had a Gibson SG with some Lollar P-90-style pickups in it – that's just an awesome session guitar. I nearly always use that whenever I need to produce something with electric guitar, so that kind of filled in some of the gaps around the T. ag

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GREG RIETWYK OF MELBOURNE PUNKS **PRESS CLUB** TALK ABOUT ENDLESS MOTION, RICKENBACKERS, AND THE JOY OF SELF-PRODUCTION. WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON.** PHOTO BY **NICK MANUELL**.

Currently in their twelfth year together, Press Club are a Melbourne-based punk act who keep reinventing their musical methods. Endless Motion is their third album, which was produced by guitarist Greg Rietwyk with the rest of the band. It delivers energetic indie rock and punk grit in equal measure. Rietwyk sat down with Australian Guitar to discuss the making of the album, the band's upcoming album tour, and the restless sound of *Endless Motion*.

**The last Press Club album, *Wasted Energy*, was released in 2019. Did the COVID years between that album and this current album allow time for you guys to think about different musical directions to go in?**

Definitely. I think that was the main thing. I mean, one of the positives from the whole experience was that we did have time to think about the tunes a little bit more and just experiment with different sounds and textures. I think you'll hear that in the release when it finally comes out - it's definitely more of a progression on the sound than the first two records.

**Were you the main producer for this album?**

Yeah. So I was kind of spearheading the whole thing. But then the other dudes are pretty into it as well, and into the production side of it, so we can all do it together. But I definitely engineered it and mixed the whole thing.

**What do you guys like about DIY production?**

We kind of just trust each other. You know, we've been collaborating for a really long time now. So I feel like we've got the skills and if we're able to do it ourselves, we may as well. We have tried to work with other people in the past and collaborate. But this just feels like the right way to do it for us.

**Due to Press Club only having one guitar, one bass, drums, and a lead singer, is there an emphasis on a big guitar sound filling space in this album?**

The guitar sound has always been a pretty driving force of the whole Press Club sound. But I think on this record, we've had the chance to dial it back, you know. In the past I've been overcompensating with fuzz pedals that take up a lot of space, but in this new record, there's more slower tempos, so there's more room for ambience and space for the music to breathe. I mean, I'd say it's framed by natural tones I guess, as opposed to anything overly processed. I'm liking vintage sounding stuff these days, but it's down to whatever works with the song. With different tones and different guitars, you can create different atmospheres for a song to live in. So, you know, I'll probably listen to what Natalie is singing about, and I'll try and create a mood with that, or a colour. If I want it to sound kind of cold, I'll try and find a way to do that through the timbre of the guitar, it's more of a feel thing at the time you know, whatever feels right.

**Being a fan of Telecasters and Rickenbackers, are these the main guitars you used to record *Endless Motion*?**

I sort of had a few different tools this time. I think I went a little bit silly, maybe from a little bit of boredom, and I bought a few more guitars during lockdown. For this record I bought a Bernie Les Paul. They're like 70s Japanese knockoffs of Les Pauls, so I bought a Les Paul custom style guitar, as well as a Mosrite, another late 70s Japanese copy. They featured heavily on this record.

**Are you guys looking forward to giving your new songs life on stage, and to share them with your fans in Paris and Austria?**

Yeah, absolutely. I'm super psyched. Even now we've just been on the road for the last week on a tour called the GUTS tour, which is basically a travelling tour that's been driving all around the country and taking music to remote places. So we've just done regional South Australia on the first leg of it. This is kind of our first time playing a bunch of these new songs to people, and the response has been really awesome. I'm super excited to take it worldwide.

**Were you playing in some pretty out of the way places for the Guts touring?**

Definitely. We played on Kangaroo Island, which was pretty crazy. We had to get the ferry over there. So we're stoked to be able to be a part of this. I think we're all pretty stretched at the moment trying to juggle a million different things, as you often are as a musician. But I'll go back and just work on some records that I'm working on and then we're back on tour on Thursday. The next three months are just solid touring, so it's gonna be pretty hectic.

**Yeah, I can imagine. Are you producing these records for other bands or for your own thing?**

I'm producing three different artists at the moment. I'm making records with a band called Mid City who are really sick, they're another Melbourne-based band. There's also an album with my friends Raging Hormones as well, and a debut album coming out from Money Boys. So there's heaps of new music, which is exciting. This has happened after things being super quiet for two years, with not much to do. Now I've probably never been busier. I'm just stoked to see the music's back again, and no one's lost the spirit. They're pretty keen to get into it.

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# ALCHEMISTS OF AGGRESSION

ON THEIR THIRTEENTH STUDIO ALBUM, **CLUTCH** CONTINUES TO EXPAND MINDS AND GET HEADS BANGING WITH NINE BOLDLY ORIGINAL NEW SONGS. WORDS BY **CORIN SHEARSTON**.

Continuing to carve out a strong global following from their soulful heaviness and quirky, esoteric lyricism, Maryland hard rock quartet Clutch recently released their thirteenth studio album, *Sunrise On Slaughter Beach*. Now in their third decade as a band, Clutch still deliver refreshingly diverse sonic journeys built from raw guitar tones, deep grooves and gruff-yet-soaring vocals. As a result of their creative efforts, Clutch have toured the world on the backs of their popular hard rock albums, while sharing stages with the likes of Mastodon, Primus and Corrosion Of Conformity. Self-described as an 'efficient' album, clocking in at just over 30 minutes, *Sunrise On Slaughter Beach* was spearheaded by its three singles, 'Red Alert (Boss Metal Zone)', honouring one of the world's most popular guitar pedals in its title, which was followed by 'We Strive For Excellence' and 'Slaughter Beach'.

Clutch guitarist Tim Sult joined Australian Guitar for a quick chat from Portland, Oregon, on the night of a new Clutch tour date with Helmet, Quicksand and J.D. Pinkus (Butthole Surfers, Melvins), which has six days left of its 26-day run.

**Were you guys hoping to deliver a new type of sound to your fans by working with another different producer for this album?**

I don't know if we were trying to deliver anything different. We were always going to do what we always do - get in a room together and try to write songs that all of us like. So that's really all we're going for at the end of the day. But yeah, it was the first time working with producer Tom Dalgety [Pixies, Ghost, Royal Blood]. We enjoyed working with him, and we liked all the suggestions that he brought to the table. We were very happy with the final product.

**Did he deliver what you guys had in mind for the new album?**

I don't know if we really went in with an idea of what we wanted the producer to do. It's good to have somebody there to tell us what we should keep and what we should dump. Sometimes we spend a lot of time working on an idea that probably we should have stopped working on months ago. But it's always good to have a fifth person in the room with us saying, "yeah, play this or no, don't play that".

**How did you get your supercharged guitar tone on the album?**

Usually I just turn up the amps as loud as I can, and hope for the best. I like to use as much of the amp distortion as possible. I never use any kind of distortion or fuzz pedals when playing live. In the studio every once in a while I will. It definitely helps for some parts. Whenever I tried to use them live it just sounds ridiculous.

**What are some of your favourite tracks from *Sunrise On Slaughter Beach*?**

I really love playing all of them. They're all super fun to play. But I think from a combination of playing it and listening to it, I would probably say 'Nosferatu Madre' might be my favourite song.

**What were the main guitars that you used on this record?**

I guess I was really bored during the pandemic and I bought too many guitars, so I probably used more guitars on this album than I have on any other. I ended up using about four different Banker guitars, made by a small-scale guitar builder from Georgia. I also used some Seeger guitars, from another small builder based out of Maine, and a couple of Gibsons as well. So I probably used about seven or eight different guitars on this recording, whereas on some previous albums, I only use one guitar. I think that really led to the diversity in the guitar sounds from track to track.

**I hear the album had vibraphone and theremin on it as well?**

Yes, our drummer JP played some vibraphone, and [engineer] J.Robbins actually played the theremin on the album. Our singer Neil [Fallon] has been playing it live on this tour. It's only for one song, ['Skeletons On Mars'], but it definitely adds a different element to the show.

**When might Aussie Clutch fans get to hear some of these new songs live?**

Oh, hopefully we're going to make that happen next year. We need to get back down there. It's been so long since we played in Australia, so we're definitely going to get there next year if we can.

**The music video for the album's title track came out a little while ago. It looks like something from a sci-fi film! How were you involved in its production?**

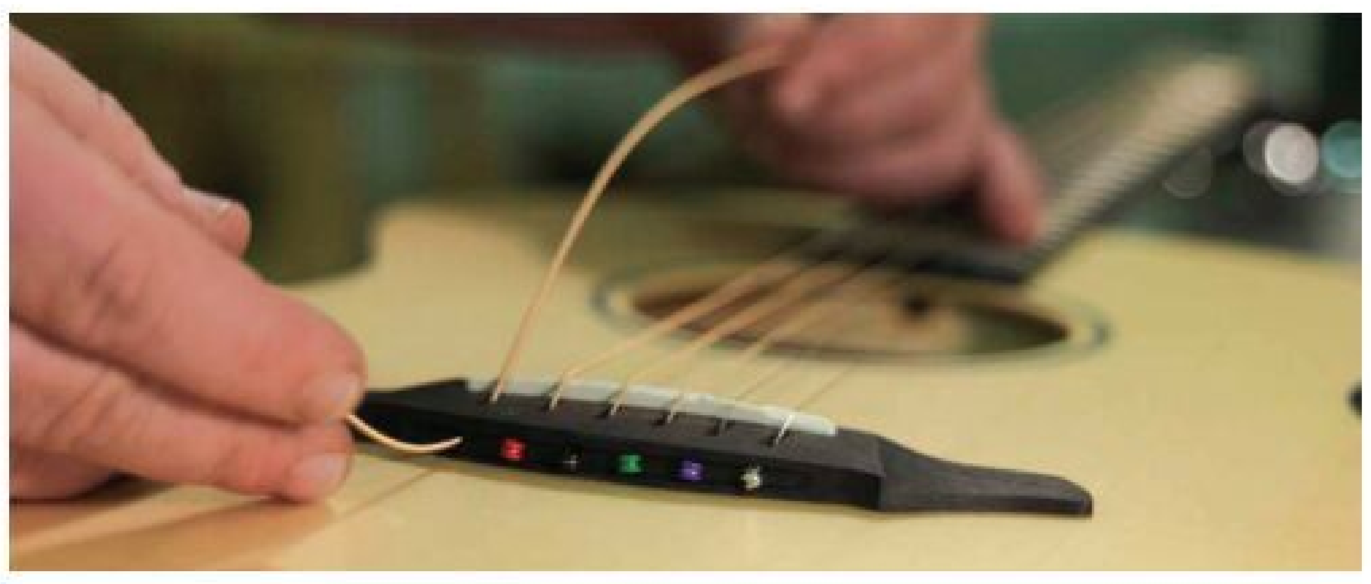
We've been working with this guy, David S. Brodsky, who did several of our last videos. For the last two videos with him, he's gotten really into using these video walls, [a display of multiple screens, positioned to look like one big screen], which he uses to build a science fiction type story. So we just let him do his thing. We just stood there, played our instruments, [did a little bit of acting] and hoped for the best.

**Now that you're on the road with Clutch, have you guys been talking about coming up with some new songs already, or are you deep in tour mode?**

We're definitely in tour mode. However, we recorded the new album a year ago, so once we have some time off, we're gonna get back together and start putting some new ideas together. That's what we usually do.

**Before we wrap up, do you have anything you'd like to say to the Clutch fans in Australia?**

Sorry we haven't been able to get down there for the past couple of years. But like I said, we're gonna try to make that happen next year.



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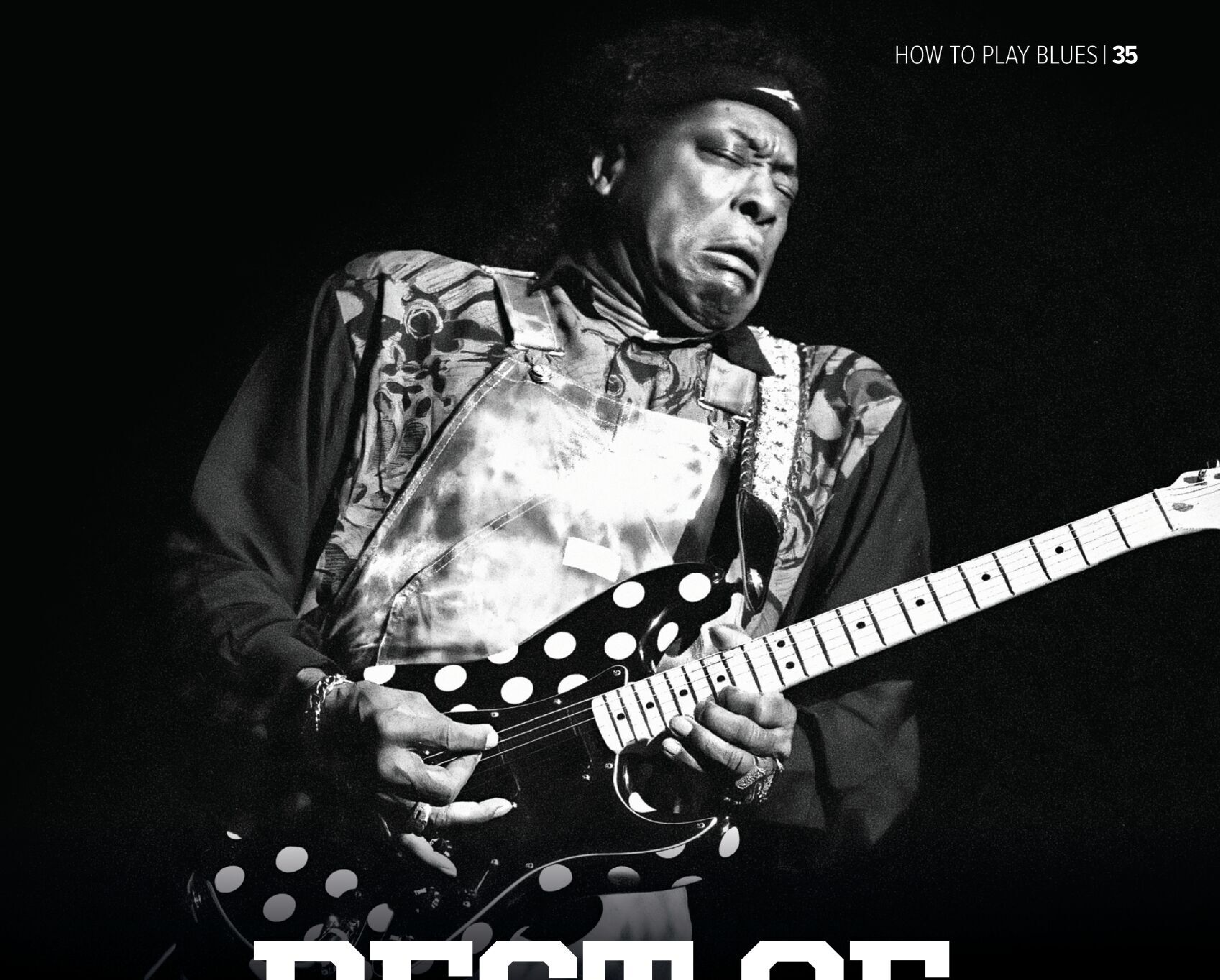


# BEST OF THE BLUES

If you're raring to play the blues, boy have we got just the feature for you. We kick off with a handful of tips to help you polish up those essential chords, progressions and soloing techniques.

Across 20 pages we profile the greatest blues guitarists of all time – from early innovators such as **Robert Johnson** and **Sister Rosetta Tharpe** all the way through to 21st Century masters **Gary Clark Jr.** and **Eric Gales**.

With a new album from **Buddy Guy** released this month, we celebrate the career of the last of the electric blues pioneers. And with a new live album from **The Jimi Hendrix Experience** also out now – recorded in 1969, and featuring his classic blues number *Red House* – we examine how Jimi put his own unique spin on the genre.

Photo Bill Tompkins/Getty Images

Words Jonathan Horsley, Neville Marten, Ellie Rogers, Jenna Scaramanga, Jon Bishop, Richard Barrett

# BLUES TIPS

Improve your blues guitar playing with our lessons on essential chords, progressions, soloing techniques and a couple of star tips. Plug in, and let's get your mojo workin'...

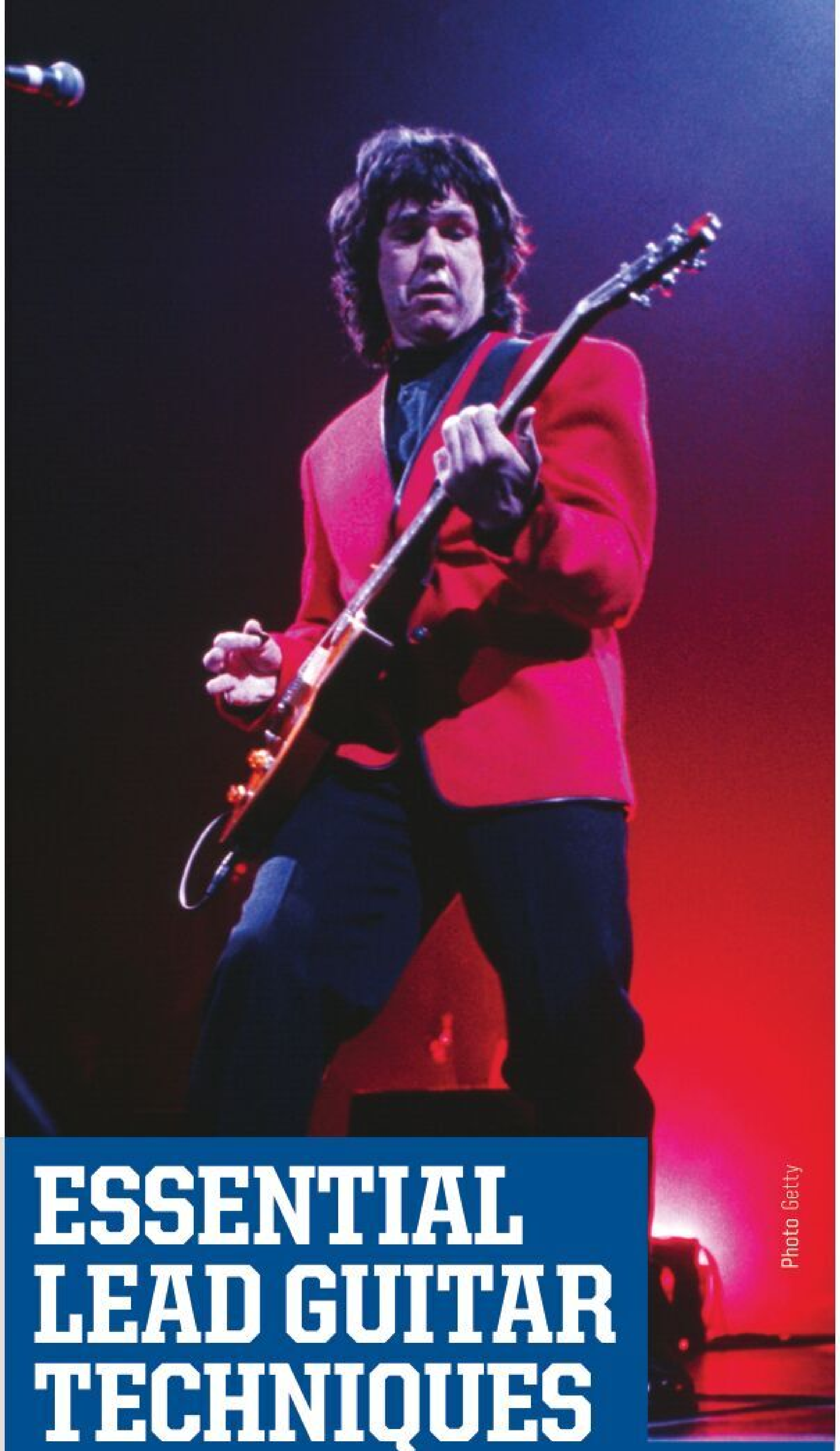
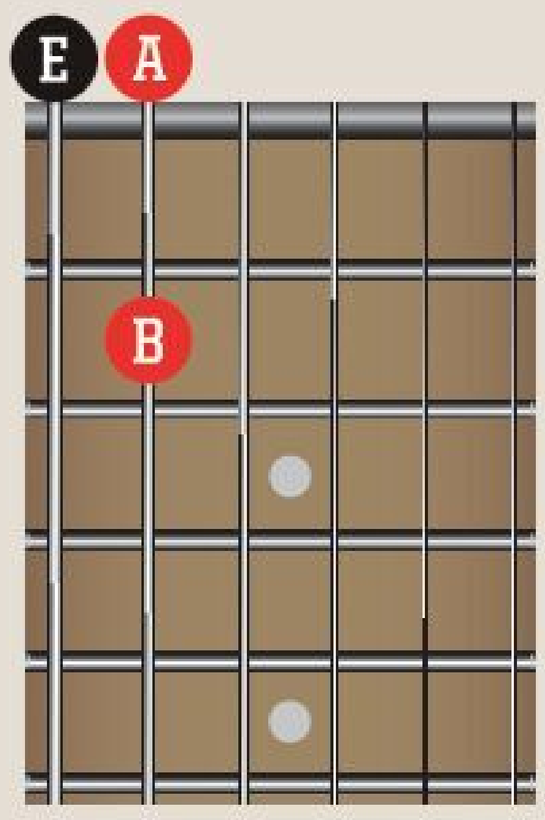


Photo Getty

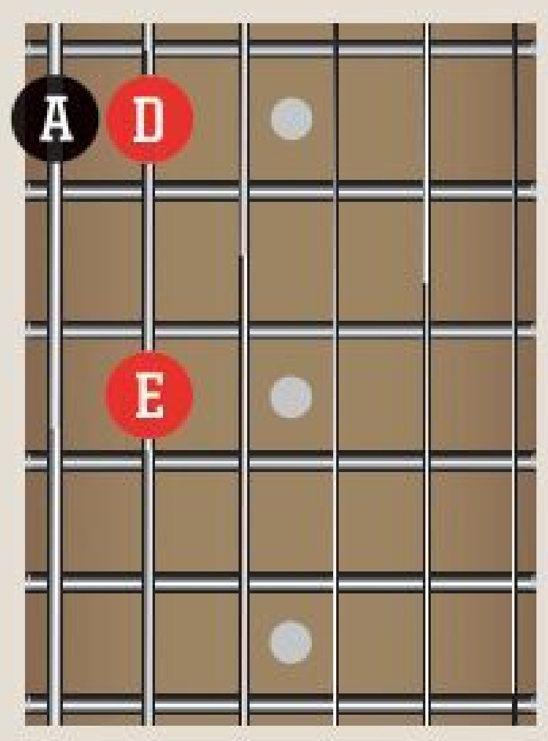
## MASTER THE I-IV-V PROGRESSION

Get to grips with the most important chord progression and you'll always know where you are in any 12-bar blues jam

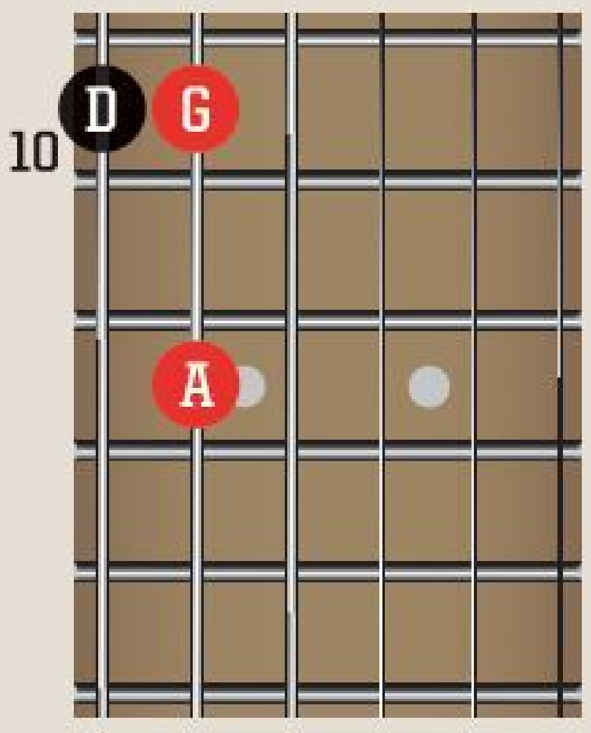
The most common blues chord progression is the I-IV-V (one-four-five), so called because the chords are built upon the first, fourth and fifth notes in the relevant major scale. So if we tell you that the notes in the key of C are C, D, E, F, G, A and B, it's easy enough to tell that a I-IV-V follows the C (first), F (fourth) and G (fifth) chords. Still with us? It's hard to remember the right notes for every key, but you can work out the right chords just by using the notes on the two lowest strings...



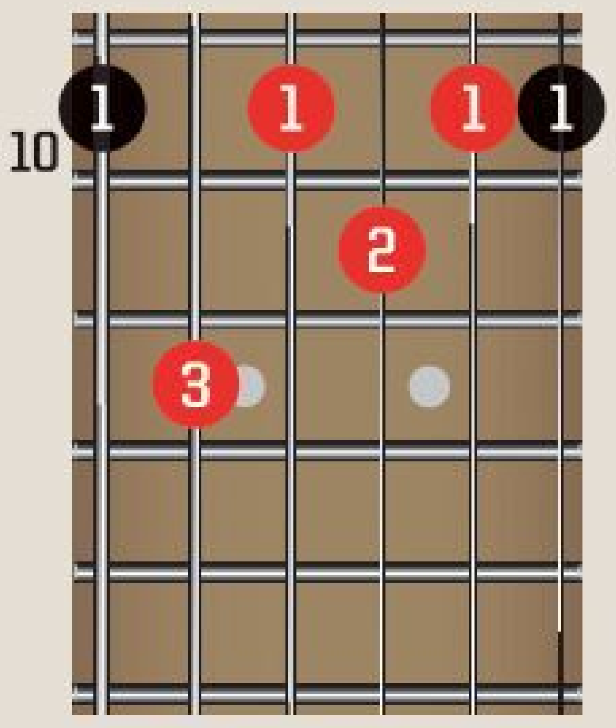
**BLUES IN E**
The notes in the key of E are E, F#, G#, A, B, C# and D#, so a I-IV-V progression uses chords built on E, A and B as shown here.



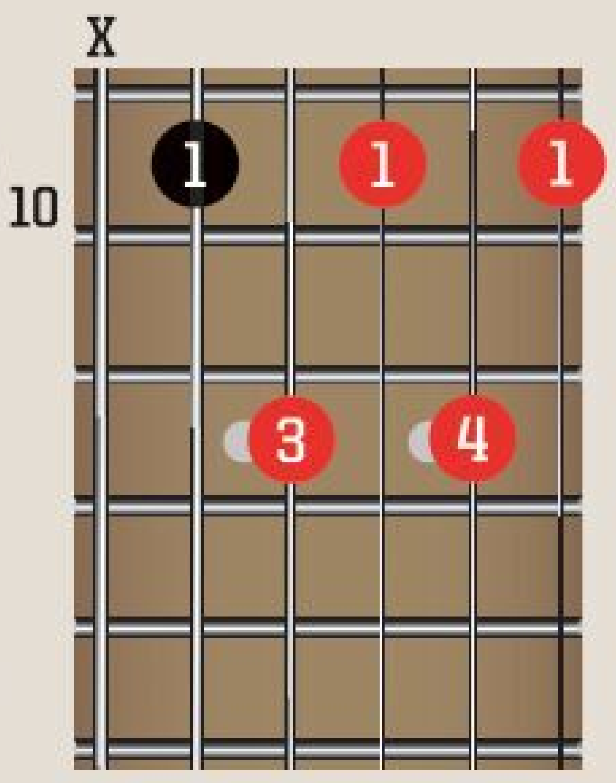
**BLUES IN A**
In the key of A the notes are A, B, C#, D, E, F# and G#. Moving up the fretboard, you can see the notes are in the same relative positions as in E.



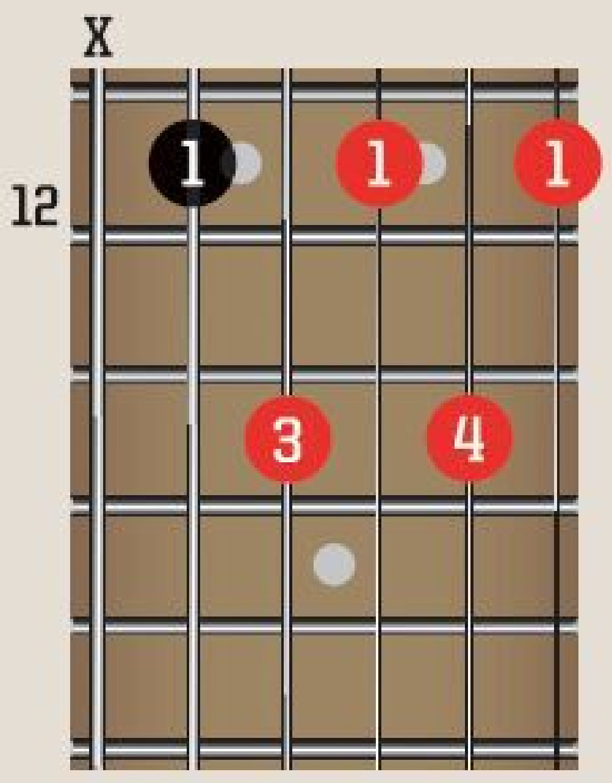
**BLUES IN D**
Starting on D, now you can work out where the I, IV and V root notes are without knowing the scale.



D7



G7



A7

**BUILDING THE CHORD SEQUENCE**
Staying in D for now, you can use these chord shapes to build a I-IV-V progression. Obviously their root notes are the notes we just identified. So, with a pattern for the I-IV-V notes established and a chord for each note provided, all you need to play in any key is to move to the relevant starting point on the sixth string. Easy!

## ESSENTIAL LEAD GUITAR TECHNIQUES

Don't leave home without 'em! Five ways to improve your solos

### UNISON BEND

**1** Two strings are played at the same time, with the lower one bent up to the pitch of the higher string.
**Hear it:**
**Jimi Hendrix – *Highway Chile*** (0:00-0:14)

### QUARTER-TONE BEND

**2** The idea is to bend the string by roughly half a semitone. Listen carefully to the 'curl' on the C note in Buddy Guy's riff.
**Hear it:**
**Buddy Guy – *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues*** (0:10)

### VIBRATO

**3** It's rare to find a blues solo without vibrato. Instead of letting a note just ring out, give the string a wobble.
**Hear it:**
**Gary Moore – *Too Tired*** (0:07-0:10)

### THREE- & FOUR-FRET BENDS

**4** You risk snapping strings, but you can't beat the urgency and energy of these huge bends. Try using lighter strings and downtuning!
**Hear it:**
**Albert King – *Oh, Pretty Woman*** (1:29-1:31)

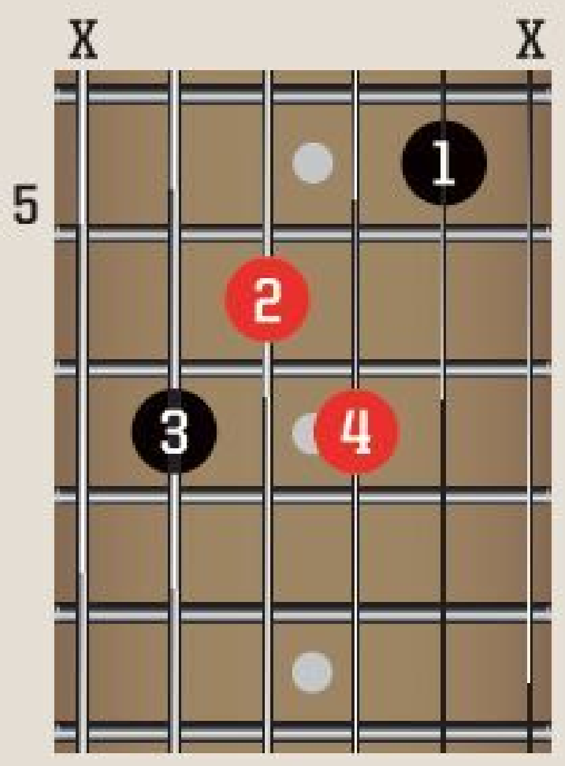
### STRING RAKES

**5** Drag your pick over muted strings as you target a normal fretted note at the end of the pick stroke.
**Hear it:**
**Stevie Ray Vaughan – *Cold Shot*** (0:00-0:18)

# LEARN MORE CHORDS

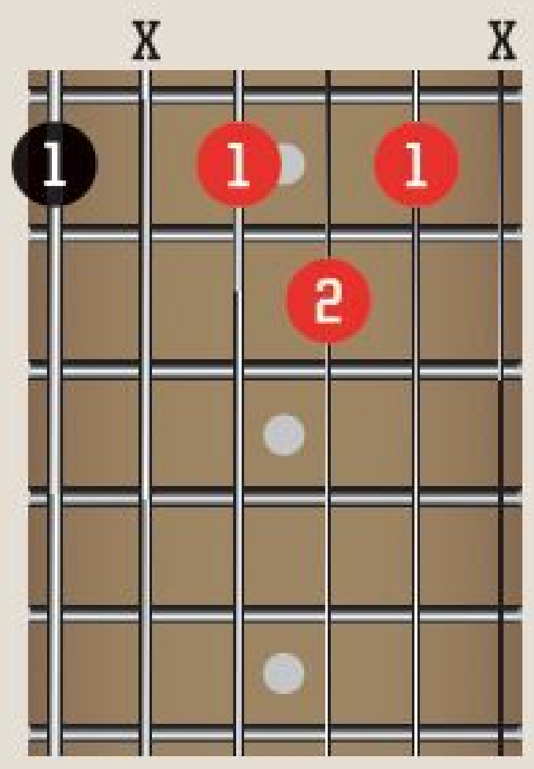
Take your blues jams to the next level with 10 inspiring shapes

We've just looked at the good old E- and A-shape barre chords. They provide ample ways for you to jam over any chord progression you could ever be faced with. However, there are loads more inspiring shapes to try. Shapes with a little more authentic bluesiness about them. Here we've presented 10 shapes for you to try out in a I-IV-V blues progression in E – so, remember, that's E, A and B. Start with E, A and B chords you already know, then try substituting for some of these.



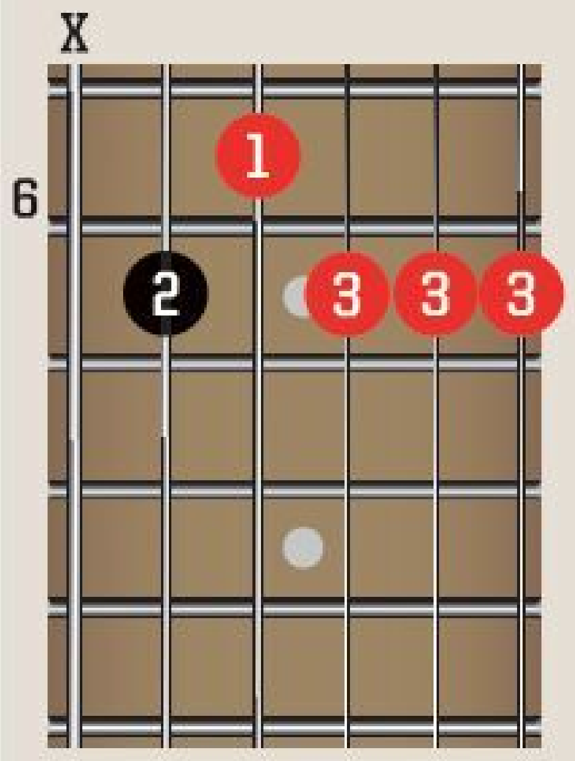
E7

**C-SHAPE 7TH CHORD**
You might recognise this as a C7 shape when played at the 1st position. Keep the open strings quiet and it's a cool moveable shape that's great for blues and jazz.



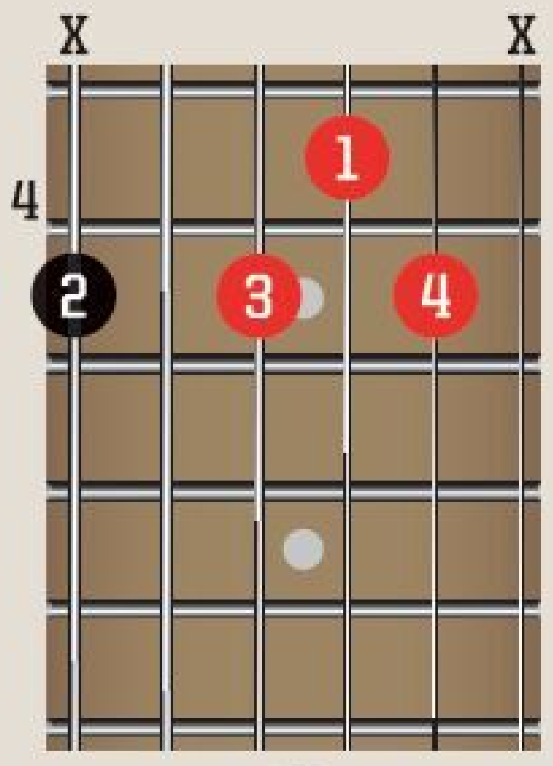
A7

**BARRE CHORD FRAGMENT**
This one's based on a well known barre chord shape, but, by ditching the fifth string, the bass note has more clarity, and overall there's a less 'predictable' sound.



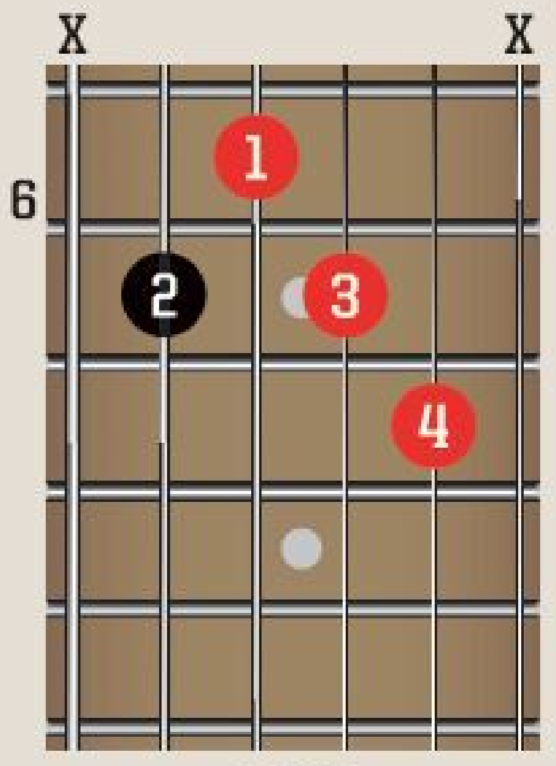
E9

**ESSENTIAL 9TH CHORD**
This 9th chord is well used but it sounds better than basic barre chords. Try sliding in from one semitone above or below in a slow blues.



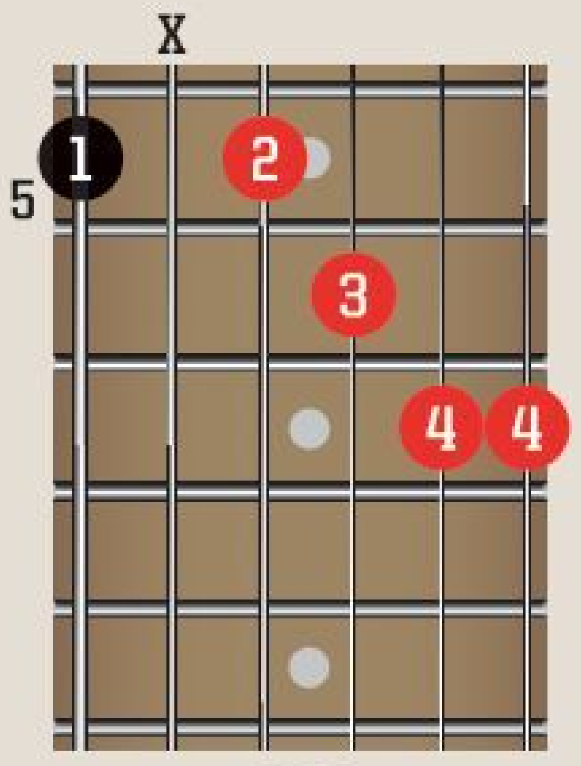
A9

**ALTERNATIVE 9TH CHORD**
This shape benefits from the same clarity in the bass as our barre chord fragment, and for the same reason. Remove the fifth string for a clearer bottom end.



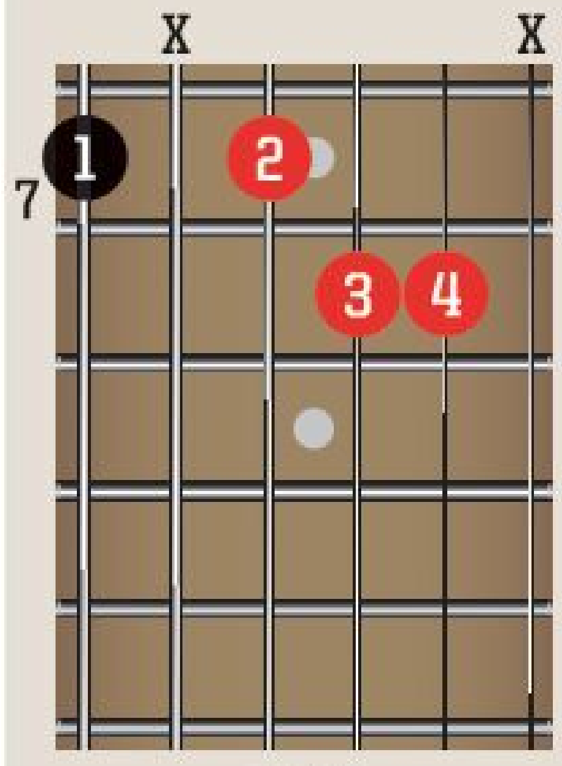
E7#9

**THE HENDRIX CHORD**
Hendrix is famous for using this chord in songs like *Purple Haze*. Forget that for now. The point is it sounds great as the V chord in a I-IV-V blues progression.



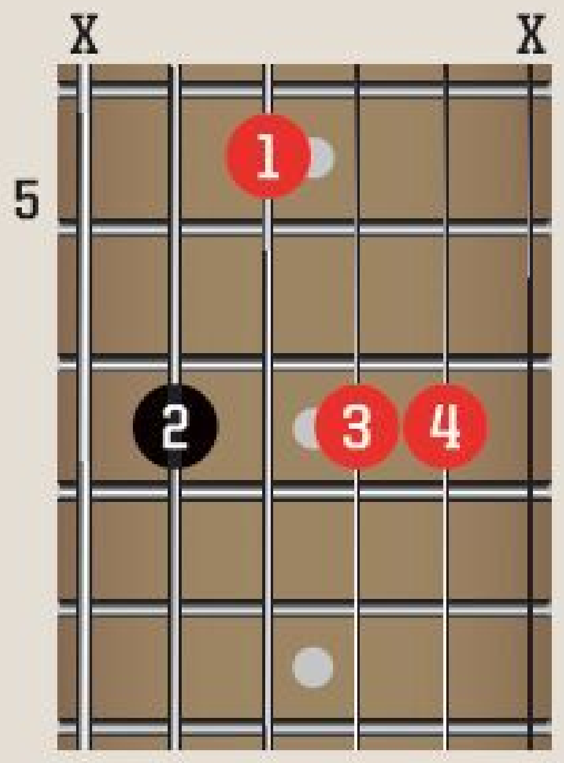
A13

**SOPHISTICATED SOUNDS**
There's a rich, jazzy vibe to this 13th chord which lends itself to exposed guitar parts where its sophistication can be heard, perhaps in slow, soulful ballads.



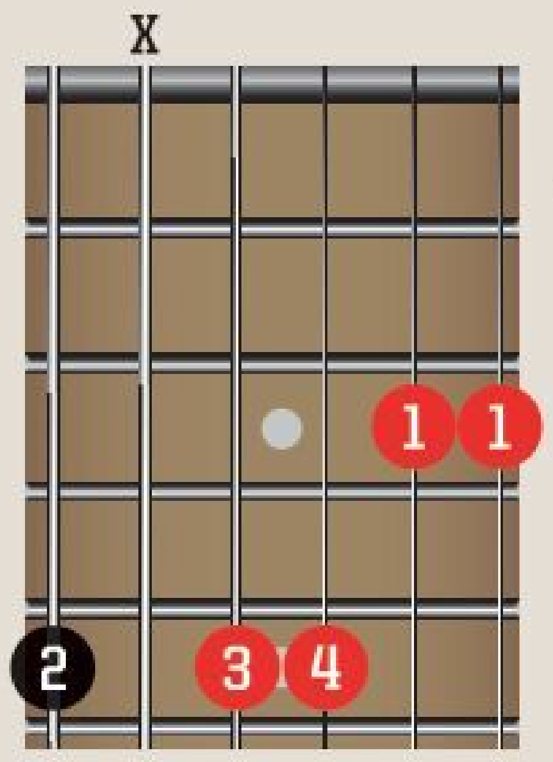
B7#5

**THE 'ALTERED' CHORD**
When a dominant 7th chord (B7, A7 etc) just doesn't have enough harmonic 'bite', try this one out. Its #5th adds more dissonance to proceedings.



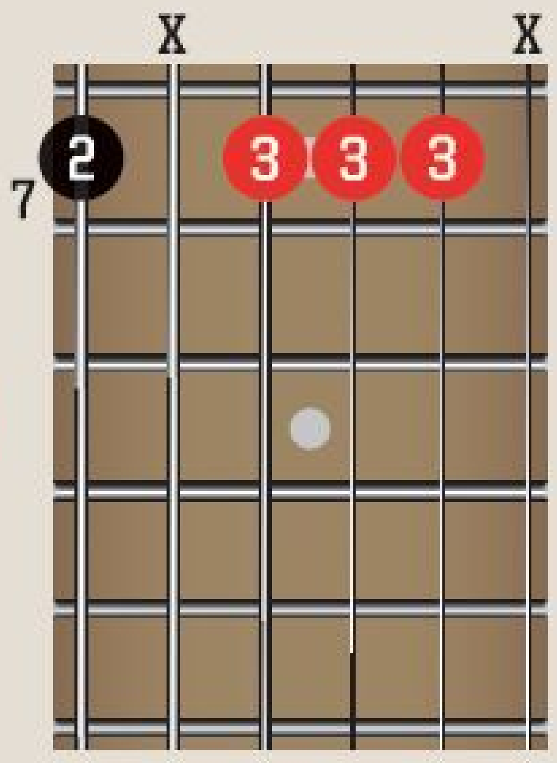
Em9

**MINOR BLUES I CHORD**
Switching to a blues in E minor (Em-Am-Bm) now, there's a laid back sound to this minor 9th chord that sounds great allied to a Dorian mode solo.



Am11

**MINOR BLUES IV CHORD**
You could stick to Am or Am7, but why not build on our minor 9th opener with this lovely minor 11th on the IV chord.



Bm7

**MINOR BLUES V CHORD**
Rounding out the minor blues chords, you'll find it easy to vamp around this Bm7 with the Em9 because the two shapes share common notes.

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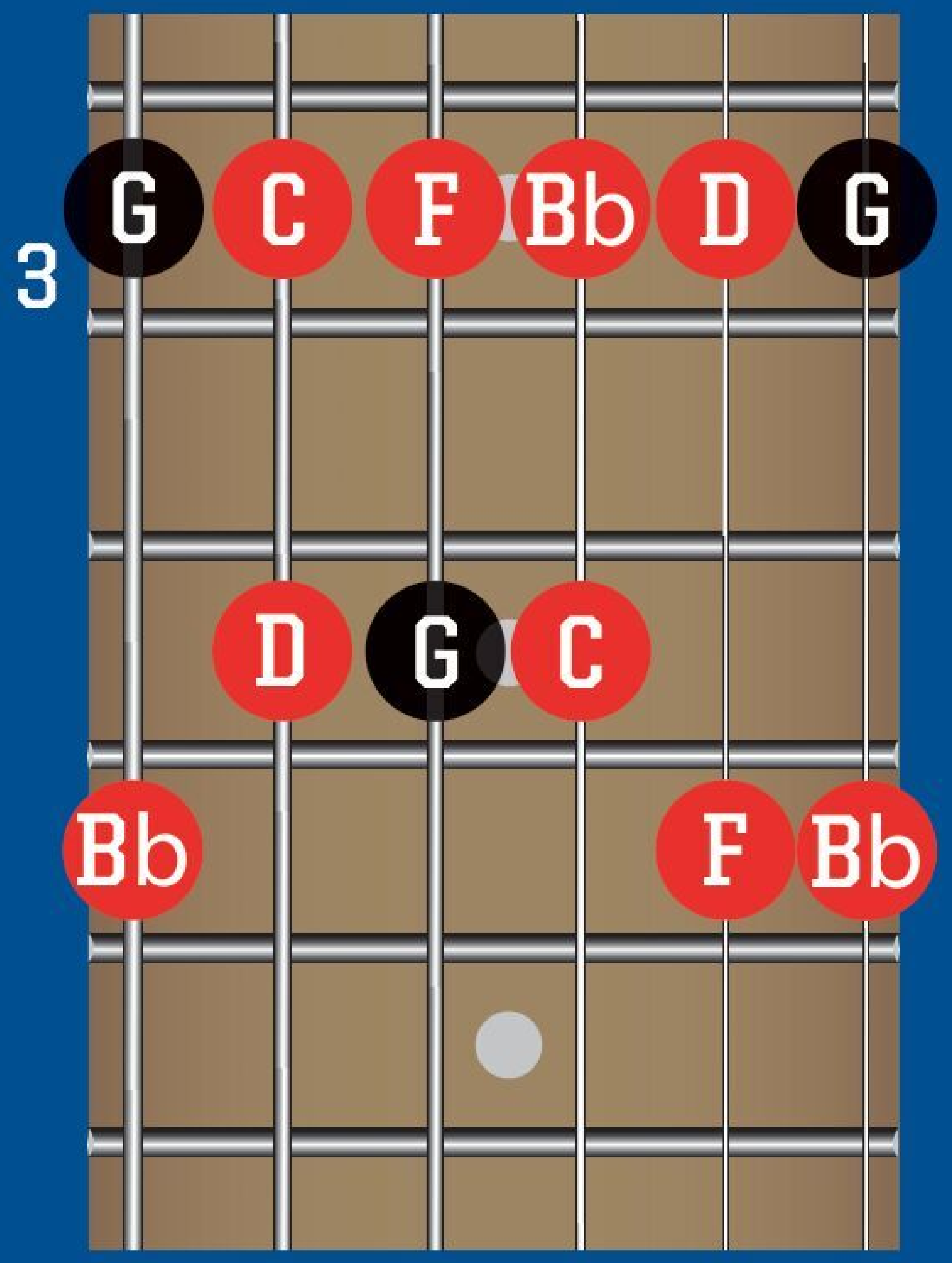
# UPGRADE YOUR MPROVS

Terrified of an impromptu blues jam? Fear not! Follow our five improv tips and your ad libbed solos will soar…

Take a look at this pattern for the G minor pentatonic scale and get used to playing it one note at a time from the lowest note to the highest, then again from high to low. All our improv tips can be applied to this shape.



G minor pentatonic scale

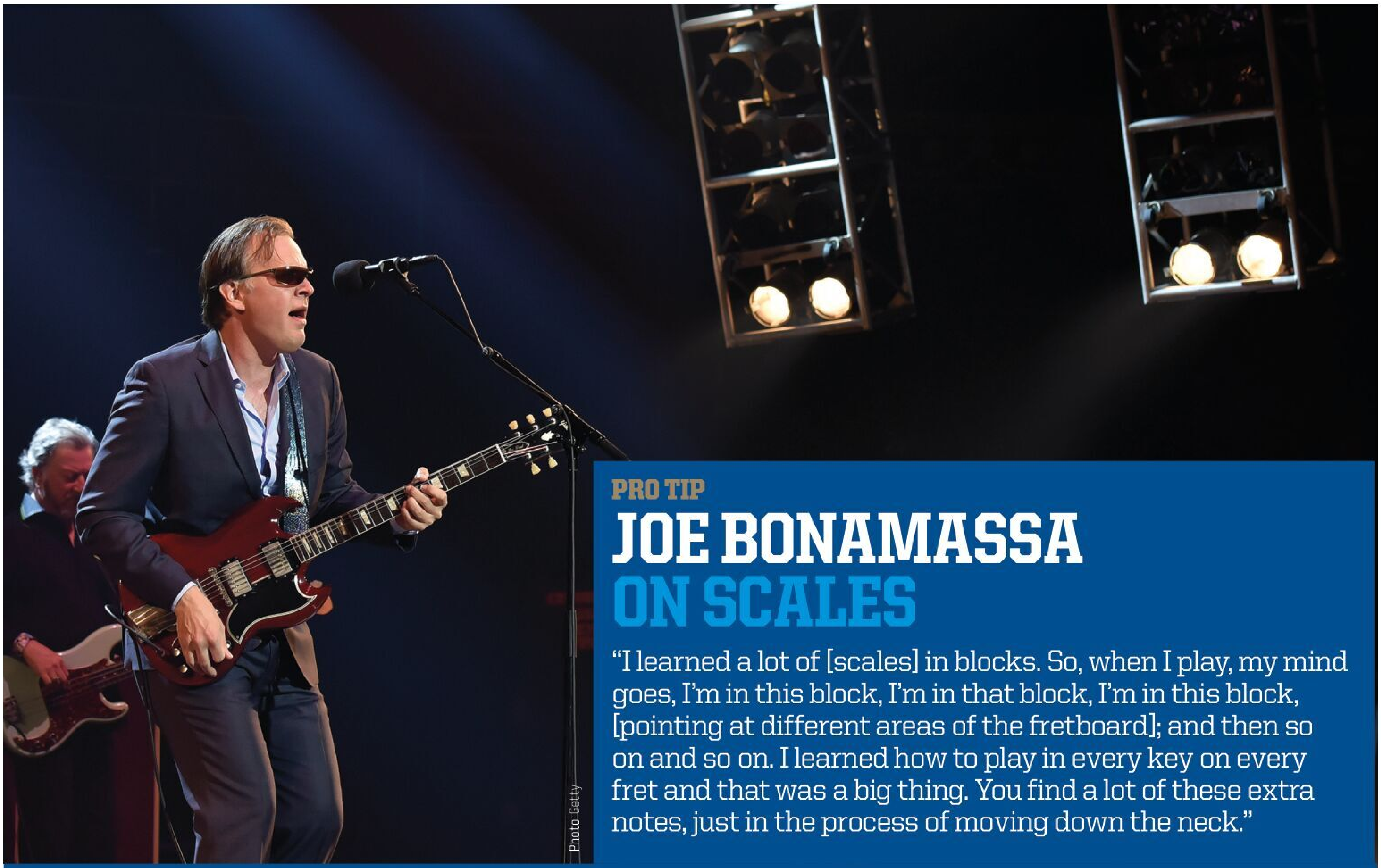
**SIMPLE SCALE RUN**
**1** A run through the notes consecutively is one of the simplest improv ideas. Try starting on the F, before playing G, Bb C, D, F, then bending up to G.

**BACKWARDS**
**2** Now play your scale run in reverse; it's a great way to develop a good idea. Remember, this is blues so it doesn't matter if it doesn't quite work the same way in reverse. Adapt it so it feels like a completed lick.

**RETURN TO THE ROOT**
**3** Starting once again with your scale run, this time try playing the G root note in between every note or every other note.

**THREE-NOTE GROUPS**
**4** Just look at the scale shape this time as we target some three-note groups. Play G-Bb -C, then Bb -C-D, then C-D-F and so on. Also try in reverse from high to low, G-F-D etc.

**ONE-NOTE JAM**
**5** Develop complex rhythms by jamming on *just one note*! The root note is a logical start point but any note will do. Add more as your one-note rhythmic ideas take shape.



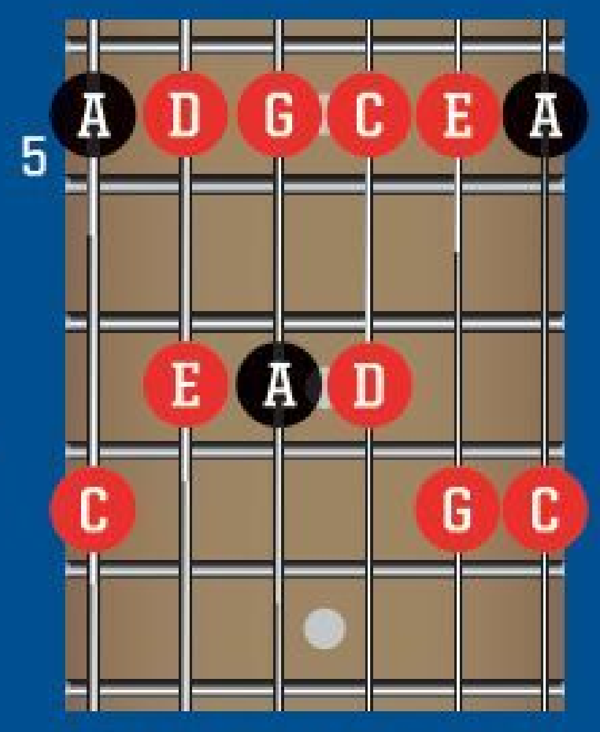
PRO TIP

# JOE BONAMASSA ON SCALES

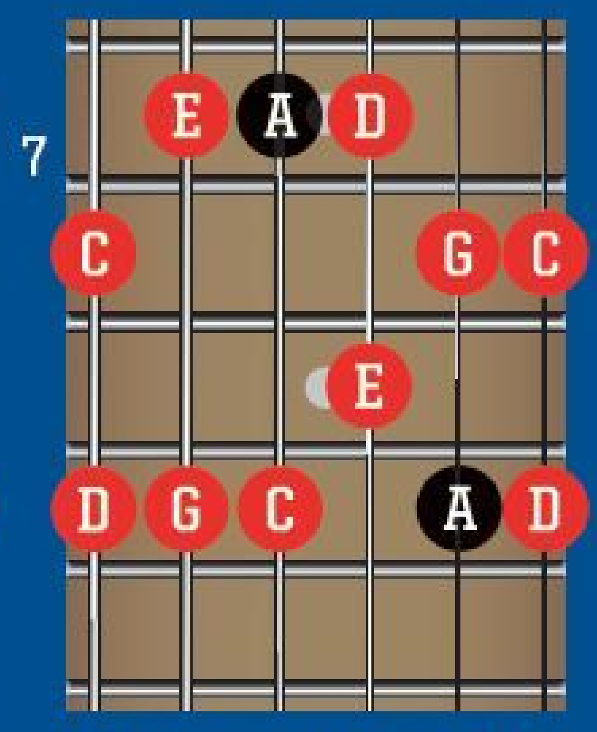
"I learned a lot of [scales] in blocks. So, when I play, my mind goes, I'm in this block, I'm in that block, I'm in this block, [pointing at different areas of the fretboard]; and then so on and so on. I learned how to play in every key on every fret and that was a big thing. You find a lot of these extra notes, just in the process of moving down the neck."

### BUILDING THE CHORD SEQUENCE

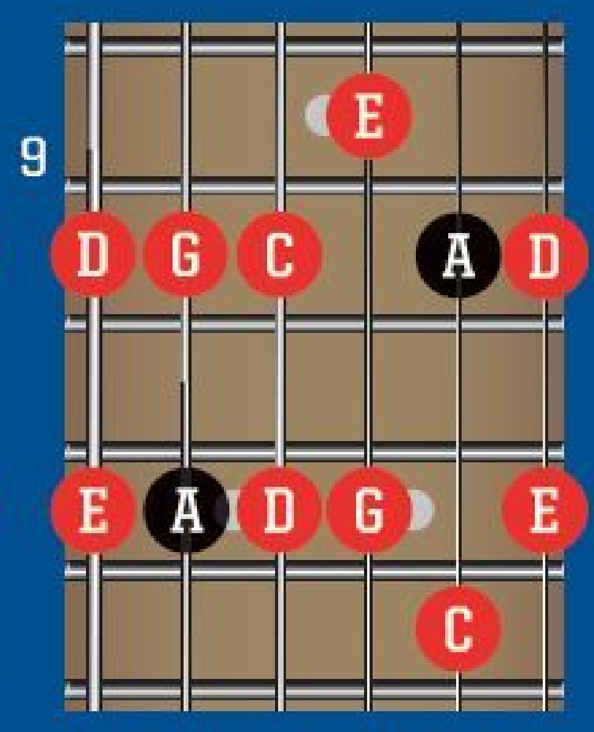
Learn these five pentatonic scale shapes and, just like Joe Bonamassa, you'll be able to improvise solos that cover the entire fretboard, thinking in blocks as you go. The most important thing to note is that all five shapes are the same scale; that's why you are guaranteed to be in one key across the whole fretboard. Simply move each shape up one fret to play in B♭ – move up another fret for B, and so on.



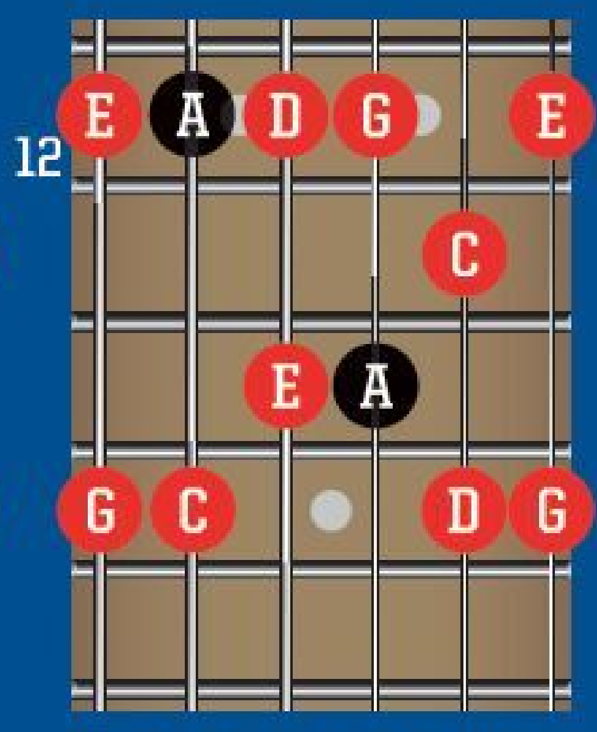
A minor pentatonic scale (shape 1)



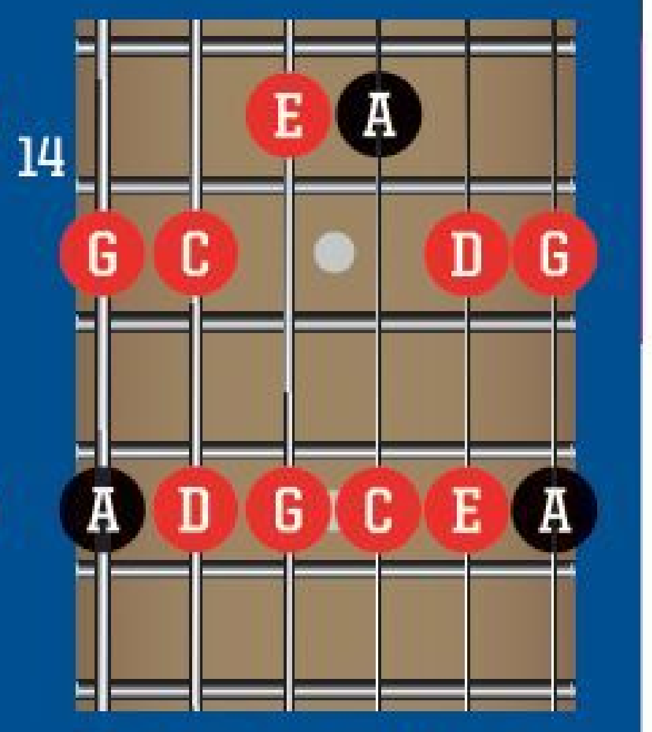
A minor pentatonic scale (shape 2)



A minor pentatonic scale (shape 3)



A minor pentatonic scale (shape 4)

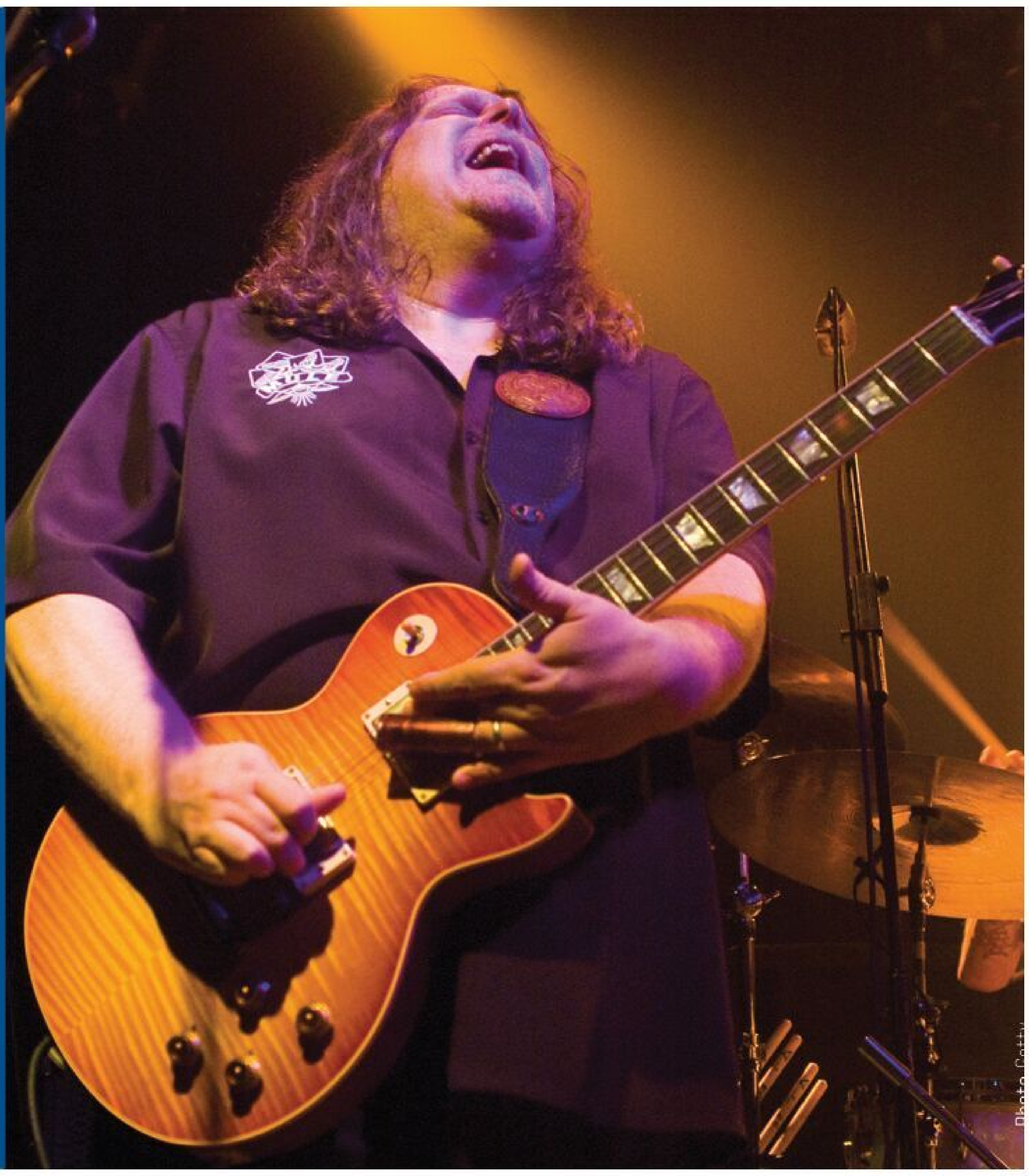


A minor pentatonic scale (shape 5)

PRO TIP

# WARREN HAYNES'S SLIDE GUITAR MUTING TIP

"The biggest breakthrough for my slide playing was when I stopped using a pick and started playing with my fingers. [You use] the fingers that you're not plucking the strings with to mute out the strings that you don't want to sound. For example, if I'm using [my first] finger to play the B string, then my thumb is on the bottom strings below it muting out those strings, and my [second and third] fingers are muting out the top strings, so you're only hearing noise coming from the string that you want. It makes a huge difference because there's so much noise coming from the slide and all those overtones that are just horrible. The best way to eliminate those is learning this finger technique. So, if you watch my right hand you can see that I'm constantly muting out the unwanted notes. That's the most important part to becoming a better slide player."



# LITTLE MARK LEGACY CONTINUES!

## MINI CMD 121P IV

**1X12"+ Piezo Tweeter**

↔ 14.96"/38cm

⤢ 4.17"/36cm

↕ 16.73"/42,5cm

⚖ 26.24lbs/11,9kg

## MINI CMD 151P IV

**1X15"+ Piezo Tweeter**

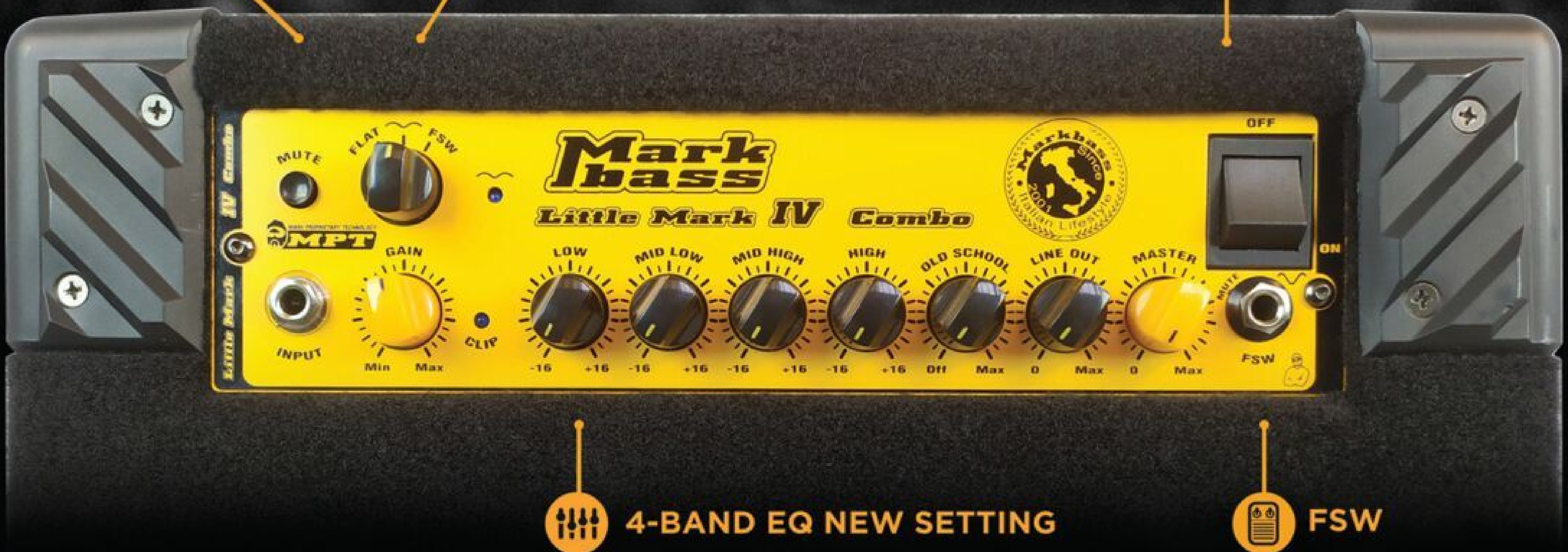
↔ 18.27"/46.4cm

⤢ 18.9"/48cm

↕ 18.27"/46,4cm

⚖ 40.79lbs/18,5kg

## Little Mark IV Combo



## CMD 121H IV

**1X12"+ 1" Driver**

↔ 15.35"/39cm ↕ 23.03"/58,5cm

⤢ 18.31"/46,5cm ⚖ 38.14lbs/17,3kg

## CMD 102P IV

**2X10"+ Piezo Tweeter**

↔ 23.03"/58,5cm ↕ 18.5"/47cm

⤢ 18.7"/47,5cm ⚖ 38.14lbs/17,3kg

## CMD NINJA 102P 500 IV

**2X10"+ Piezo Tweeter**

↔ 12.99"/33cm ↕ 27.4"/70cm

⤢ 17.05"/43cm ⚖ 36.15lbs/16,4kg

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# BLUES POWER

## Thinking about new gear for blues? Follow our guide to the best equipment on sale, and dial in your best ever tone!

If you're anything like us, when you're inspired to play guitar you'll often find yourself gassing for new gear. The most versatile option is to go digital: there are loads ands loads of you amplifiers, foot-pedals and floorboards loaded with countless effects and amp models that'll cover almost any conceivable playing scenario. But for the blues purist, analogue is the way to go.

Read on as we run through some of the best gear options available today for the aspiring blues hound. And while tone is foremost in our mind here, we've also got one eye on versatility, too.

## GUITARS

Your tonal journey begins with the instrument in your hands. We look at some of the best bluesy options around today

### SINGLE-COIL GUITARS

Fender's long-serving Stratocaster rules the roost when it comes to single-coil blues. Just ask Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy, Robert Cray... we could go on! Fender will sell you a Guy or Cray artist model for $1,799 with the former arguably the more versatile option thanks to its vintage style tremolo compared to the hard-tail unit on the Cray model. Alternatively, save some cash and opt out of artist signature models with Squier's Classic Vibe 60s Strat ($769). You'll find a bevvy of Teles in the CV series too should you wish to get your Muddy Waters or Albert King vibe going.

### HUMBUCKER GUITARS

Joe Bonamassa knows a thing or two about blues tone, and Epiphone's Joe Bonamassa Lazarus 1959 Les Paul Standard is an all-round tonal monster, great for blues and a bit of everything else. Gretsch's G5220 Electromatic Jet is a great twin 'bucker single-cut alternative. Its Broad'Tron pickups have a sweet high end that's great for shimmering cleans. Alternatively, the Little Buckers on Guild's S-200 T-Bird will do a fine turn at anything from Muddy Waters and The Black Keys (who both played S-200s) to AC/DC and Black Sabbath.

### SEMI-ACOUSTIC GUITARS

One of the most versatile semis available right now is Epiphone's BB King Lucille tribute model. A six-position Varitone switch gives you 18 possible pickup settings, and its f-hole-less, centre-blocked body ensures it shouldn't squeal out too much feedback in higher gain settings. D'Angelico's Premier Bedford SH also scores high for its all-round game, featuring T-style pickups in the neck and middle positions, plus a mini-bucker in the bridge. There's a six-point tremolo unit, too, unusual on a semi-acoustic, but really handy on a guitar that needs to do more than blues.

# AMPLIFIERS

For pure blues tone, valves still rule the roost. But which amp should you use? Read on as we narrow down your options

## FENDER BLUES JR IV

Quite possibly the world's favourite blues amp, and now in its fourth generation, the Blues Jr is loved for its compact portability and single-channel front end that can be dialed in for luscious cleans that work great with pedals, or turned up for spongy overdrive. Take it to the edge of break-up, throw a Tube Screamer in front of it, and it'll get you in the same ballpark as Stevie Ray Vaughan. Alternatively, just dime it and use your guitar's volume control to keep things orderly.

## LANEY CUB-SUPER

This is a boutique amp in a production-line amp's Tolex, and, frankly, it has no right to sound as good as it does. This stylish little combo has pretty much everything a blues player could want. There's plenty of volume, whilst also being equipped with an attenuated one-watt input for low-volume performances. Its on-board boost will keep you cutting through the mix when you take a solo, and the digital reverb is top quality. Available in both 1x12, 1x10 and head variants.

## SUPRO DELTA KING

Another contender in the Fender Blues Junior's affordable small valve combo market. Style-wise, the four racing stripes are a knowing throwback to the brand's heritage. However, the brain and guts of the amplifier are more in tune with the 21st-century trend of high-functioning yet eminently affordable tube amplifiers. Like the Laney, the combos are available in 1x10 and 1x12 inch versions, though there is no head option.

# DRIVE AND EFFECTS

Effects may be surplus to requirements for some blues players, but we'd say there are some essentials for everyone's pedalboard

DEPTH
DECAY
RATE
BLEND
HARMONIC
VIBRATO
PHASER
Vibe O Verb
MIX
REGEN
DELAY
MXR
MOD
carbon copy
TONE
DCIN
LEVEL
OVERDRIVE
OUTPUT
INPUT
TUBE SCREAMER
MINI
Ibanez
9V DC
GAIN
TREBLE
VOLUME
TUMNUS
WAMPLER
BUILT IN USA

## OVERDRIVE

### IBANEZ TUBE SCREAMER

If its signature mid boost was good enough for Stevie Ray Vaughan... Available in compact 'mini' form.

### MXR TIMMY

With three clipping modes this is a versatile drive that's great for kicking any tube amp into rich saturation.

### WAMPLER TUMNUS MINI

Wampler's Tumnus was one of the first transparent overdrive Klon 'klones', and remains one of the best.

## EFFECTS

### DUNLOP CRY BABY WAH

One of the most commonly found effects on the 'boards of blues purists. Wherever you need a workhorse do-it-all wah, use a Cry Baby!

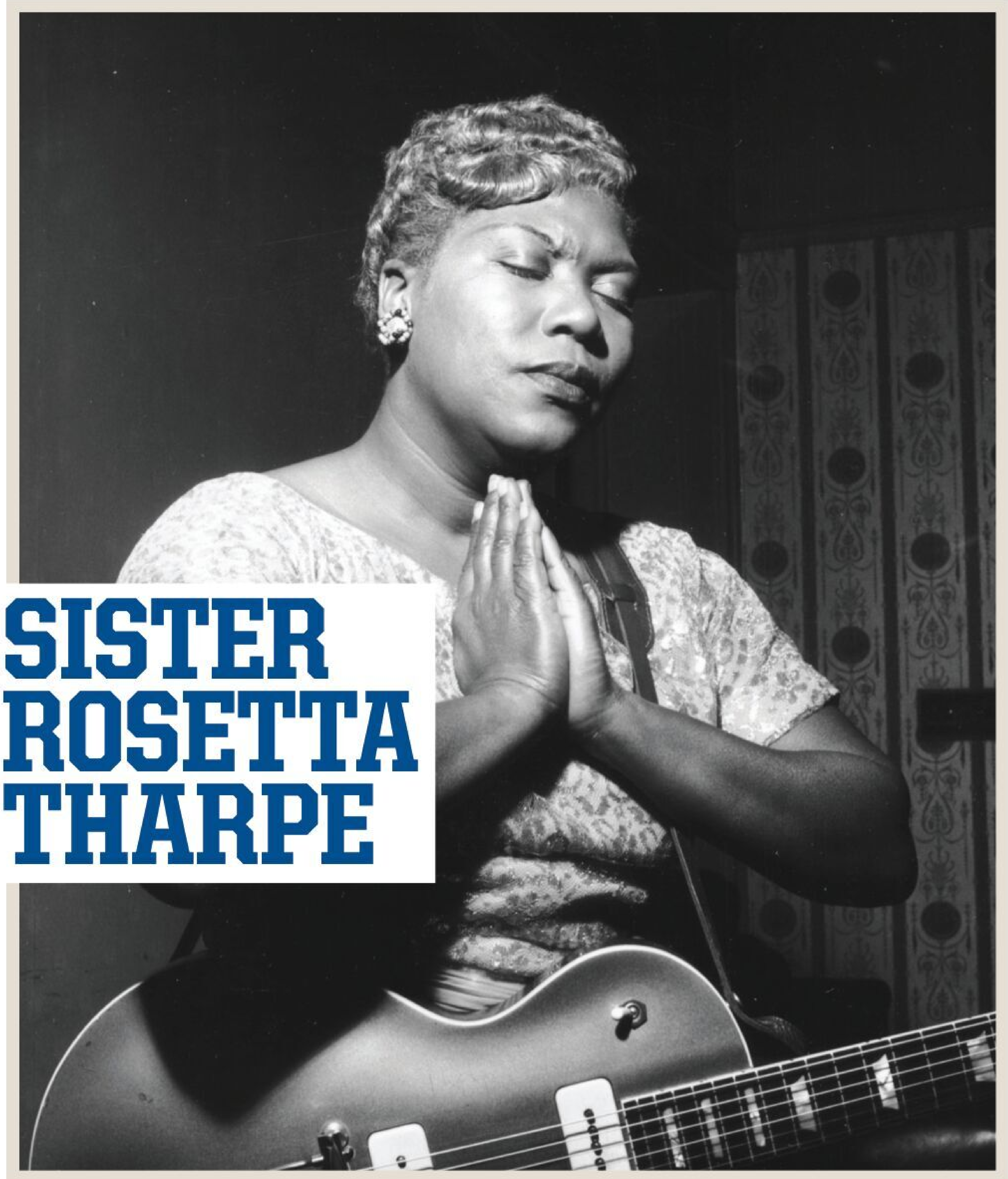
### KEELEY VIBE-O-VERB

A UniVibe-style phaser and a reverb in one pedal. Great for soft shimmery echoes and wobbly modulation.

### MXR CARBON COPY MINI DELAY

The pristine nature of digital repeats means that for blues you're better off with the darker analogue delay of this absolute workhorse.

# THE GREATEST BLUES GUITARISTS OF ALL TIME



## SISTER ROSETTA THARPE

### Gospel singer turned blues guitar slinger dubbed the Godmother of rock 'n' roll

If you haven't seen the video of this American gospel singer wowing a stunned English audience on a disused Manchester railway station back in 1964, then Google it. Said to have influenced legends including Elvis Presley, Little Richard and Bob Dylan, Sister Rosetta lost many of her religious fans when she moved from gospel into blues, but gained a whole new following. Cracking out scary licks on a Gibson Les Paul Goldtop or white SG Custom in open E tuning, her distorted guitar lines matched her powerful, heartfelt vocals. A trailblazing electric guitarist and superb singer, her place in blues history is assured.

## CHARLEY PATTON

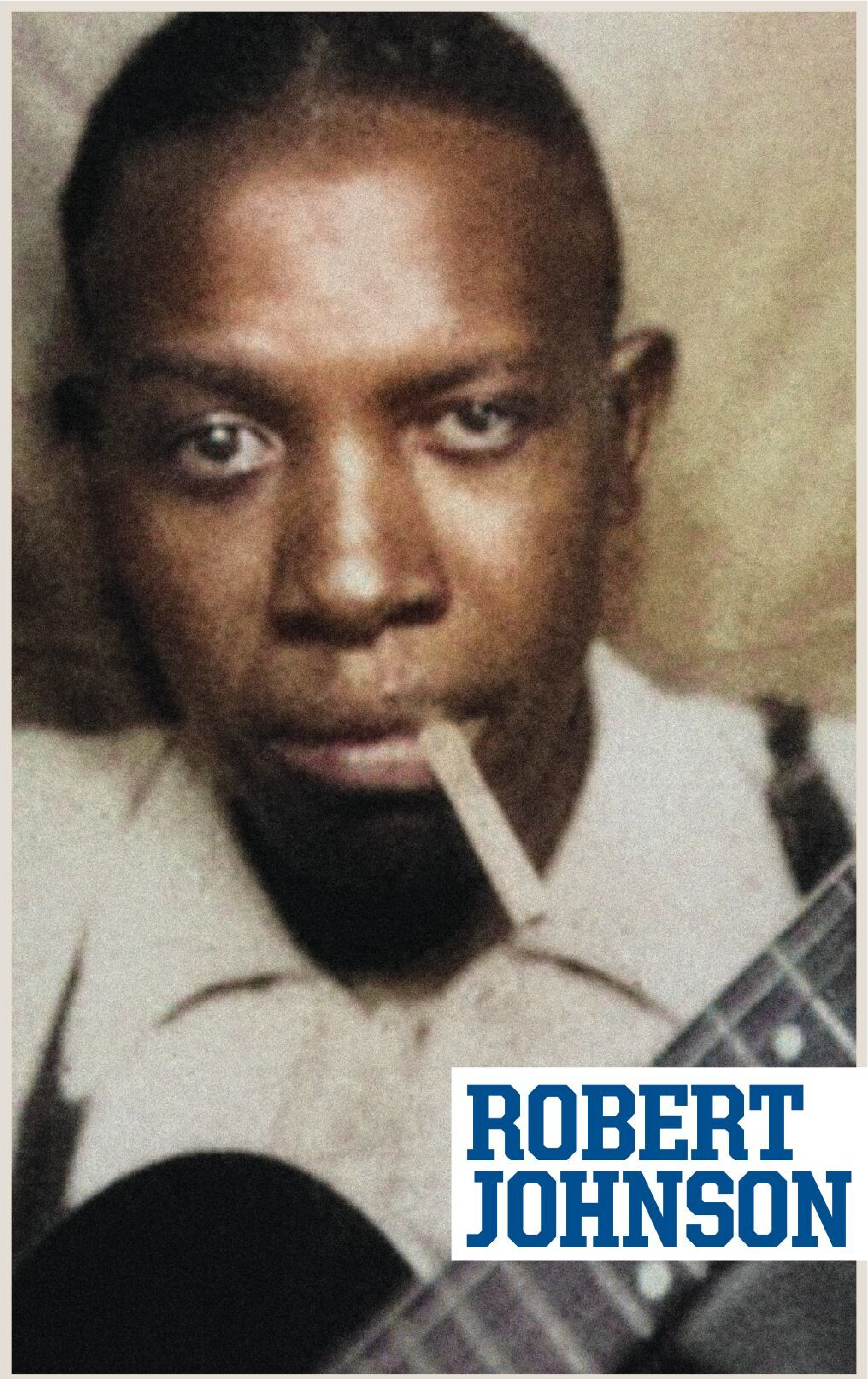
### The founder of delta blues

The 58 surviving songs we have from Mississippi resident Charley Patton come from just ten recording dates. Even with dodgy fidelity, they're a priceless document of the origins of delta blues, influencing everyone who came afterwards. Patton was among the first great blues showmen, performing with the guitar between his legs and behind his head thirty years before Chuck Berry. More importantly, his thumb slap technique was the precursor to modern slap bass. He tuned the guitar a tone sharp for his distinctive sound. Bob Dylan was a notable devotee, drawing much from Patton's folk ballads and observational lyrics.

## SON HOUSE

### *Preachin' Blues* was more than a song – it was his life story

Robert Johnson may not have sold his soul to the devil, but Son House was captured by him. After years as a Baptist preacher hostile to secular music, he heard bottleneck slide for the first time, whereupon House bought a guitar and was soon found playing the blues in juke joints. Larkin Poe, Derek Trucks and Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac all covered his *Preachin' Blues*, while Johnny Winter and The White Stripes recorded takes on *Death Letter*. Rougher and rawer than his Delta contemporaries Charley Patton and Robert Johnson, his gutsy slide style converts well to electric blues-rock.



# ROBERT JOHNSON

## The mythic figure who shaped so much of the 20th Century's guitar music

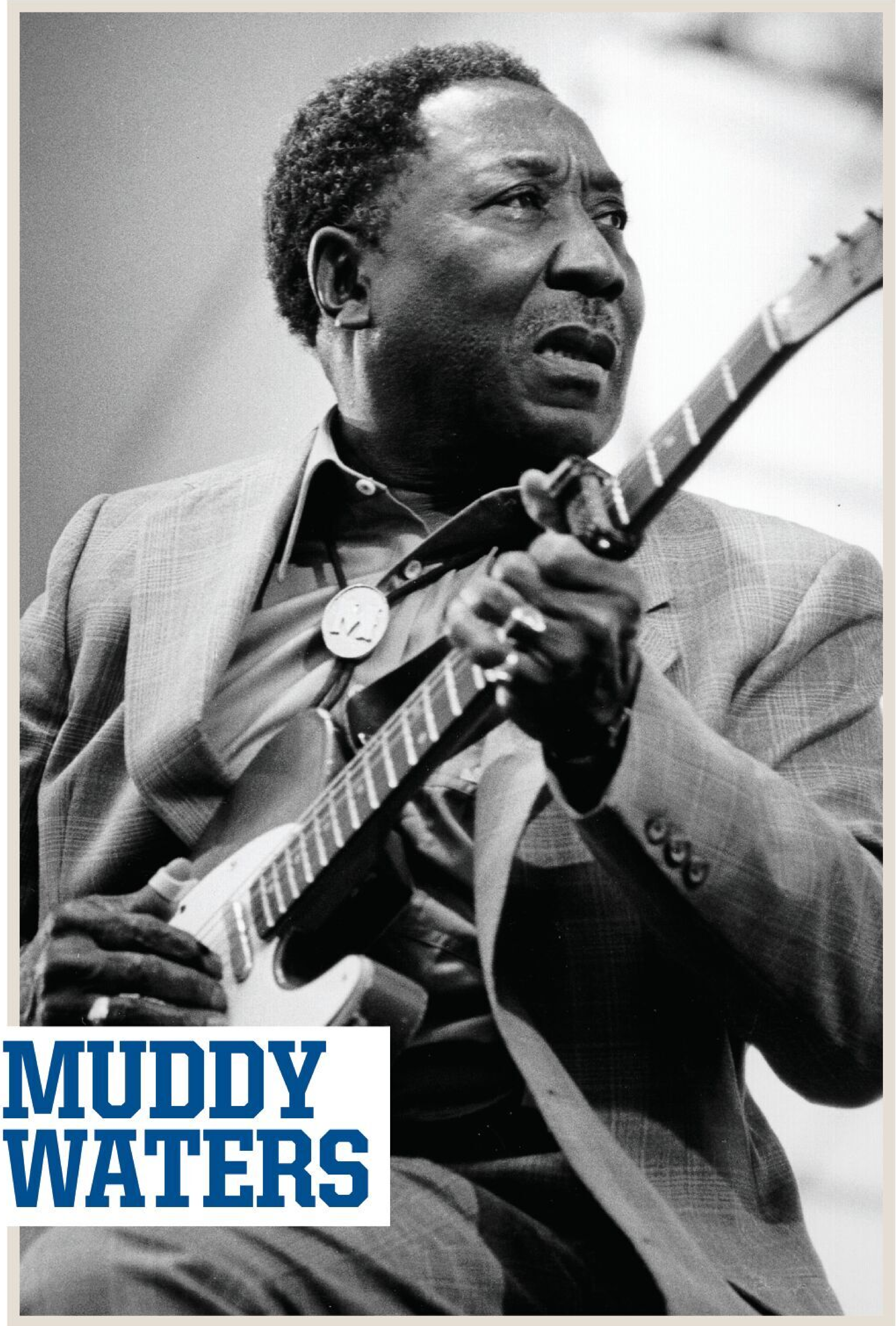
Arguably no musician has ever been the subject of such incredible mythology as Robert Johnson. Would rock 'n' roll ever have given us *Sympathy For The Devil* and *Highway To Hell* and if not for rumours of Johnson selling his soul at the crossroads? Would metal fans be scrawling pentagrams on guitars and throwing the horns if Johnson hadn't sung *Me And The Devil Blues?*

Beyond the incredible imagery, there's a sophistication and variety to Johnson and his delta contemporaries that modern blues often lacks. The art form is often reduced to endless 12-bars, while Johnson's own work embraced jazz and country. His blues compositions did not limit themselves to the 12-bar format, and his debut recording, *They're Red Hot*, was an uptempo ragtime number. Playing unaccompanied allowed Johnson and his contemporaries the freedom to play with time and tempo, and his songs have odd-length bars in unexpected places. With his singing and slide playing, he even explored microtonality in subtle ways that Jeff Beck and Derek Trucks are showered with praise for achieving today.

Musical immortality is mostly about having great songs. Beyond the legend, Johnson's name still looms so large because he wrote tunes that slap. *Dust My Broom*, *Crossroad Blues* and *Sweet Home Chicago* are the blues's biggest standards. The Rolling Stones covered *Love In Vain* and *Stop Breaking Down*, Led Zeppelin had *Traveling Riverside Blues* and *The Lemon Song*, while Steve Miller and Duane Allman both took a bite at *Come On In My Kitchen*. Guitarists like Ike Turner and Chuck Berry evolved Johnson's template into rock 'n' roll, and from that came a slew of hits.

It's not quite right to give the credit solely to Johnson. Delta blues musicians shared their creativity with each other more freely than today's copyright-driven music industry. Johnson's music carries plenty of influence from his and forebears and peers, some of whom are now forgotten. Johnson might be the most important musician in the development of 20th Century popular music, but he's also emblematic of dozens of black folk musicians who developed the genre without the pay or credit they deserved. Still, if you want to learn acoustic blues fingerstyle, Johnson's turnarounds are still the benchmark. If you want to play slide, you'll need to learn his licks. And if you're writing songs, you can only hope to capture an element of the human experience so profoundly as he did.

Photo Getty x3, Robert Johnson: Alamy



# MUDDY WATERS

## So powerful, he scared Hendrix

Six-time Grammy winner McKinley Morganfield ruled the Chicago blues scene from the mid 1940s on. Moving from Clarksdale, Mississippi in 1941 and switching from acoustic to electric guitar two years later, Morganfield (now Muddy Waters) assembled a band of the finest players in town, including Little Walter (harmonica), Otis Spann (piano) and Jimmy Rogers (guitar). Live, Muddy's band was a powerhouse. Jimi Hendrix found it terrifying – "I first heard him as a little boy and it scared me to death," quipped Jimi, who took a famous Muddy lick and turned it into *Voodoo Chile*. Muddy's playing was almost primeval. Bluesman John P Hammond stated, "Muddy was the master of just the right notes; profound, deep and simple." Although he wrote songs, he is mainly remembered for covers that became the definitive versions, such as *Rolling Stone* (from which both magazine and band took their name), *Got My Mojo Working*, *Mannish Boy*, and *Hoochie Coochie Man*. Muddy was rarely seen without his red Fender Telecaster, on which he mostly played slide and the occasional riff, but his legend and musical influence remain almost unequalled. As BB King put it, "It's going to be years before people realise how great his contribution was to American music."

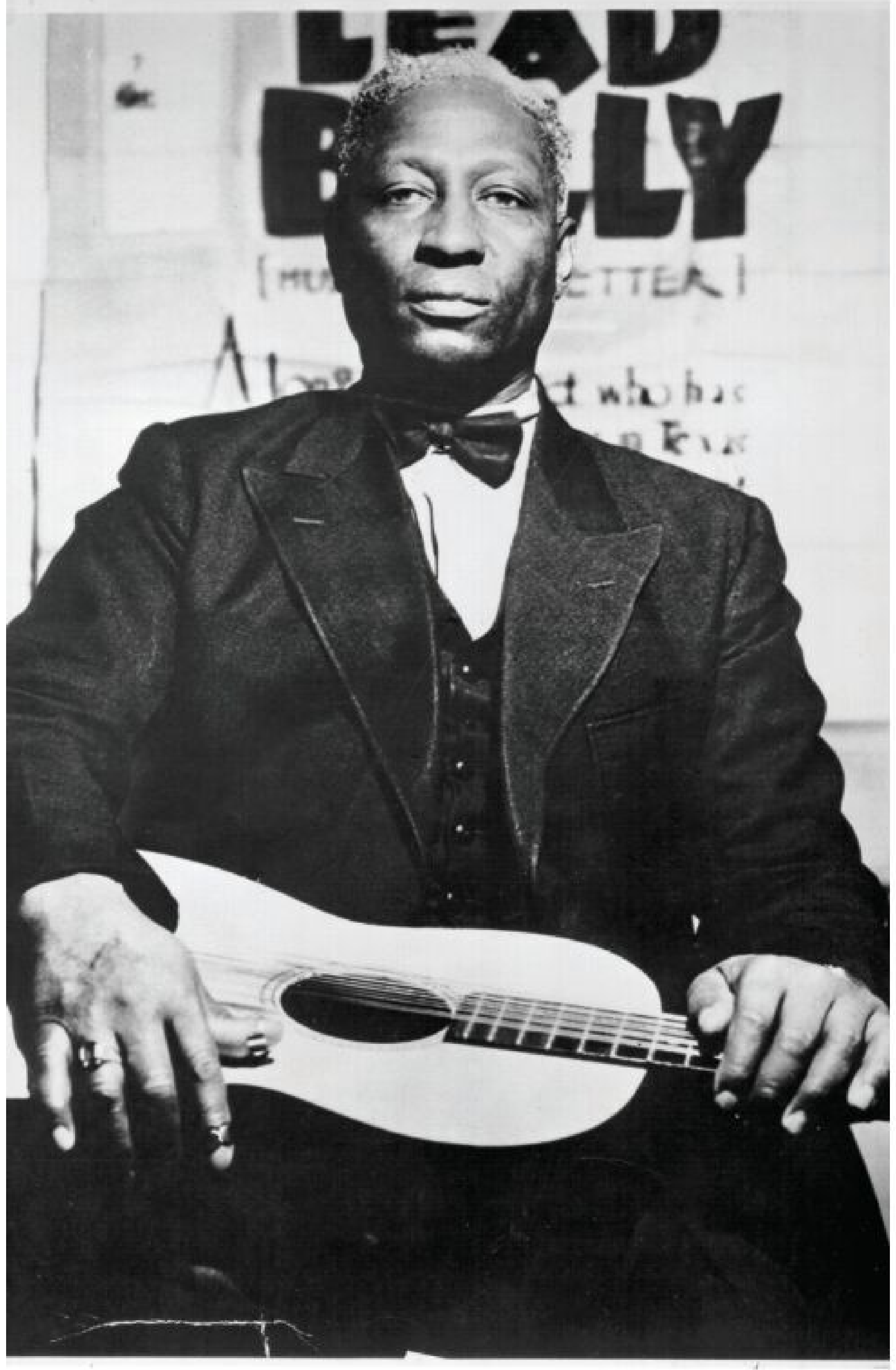
# LEAD BELLY

### The King of the 12-String

Born Huddie William Ledbetter in 1888, Lead Belly led a roaming life, picking up hundreds of songs from the oral folk traditions of the Deep South. He was a proficient multi-instrumentalist, but his primary instrument was the 12-string acoustic guitar. A posthumously released collection of prison ballads recorded in the 1930s immortalised his status with its title: *King Of The Twelve-String Guitar*. He played a 1920s jumbo-bodied, flat-topped Stella Auditorium with an extra long scale length, measuring 26.5 inches, which he would commonly tune down to B or C Standard to give his guitar its characteristically deep tonality.

Renowned not only for his musical skill, Lead Belly had an infamous predilection for violence, and it was during a stint at Lousiana's Angola Prison Farm for attempted murder that he was "discovered" by musicologists John and Alan Lomax, who were recording folk songs for the Library of Congress. The pair campaigned for his release in 1934 and recorded his classic tracks Midnight Special, Goodnight, Irene and many more.

Following his death in December 1949, Lead Belly left behind an immense body of work that directly inspired Britain's skiffle movement. George Harrison, a 12-string master himself, once said: "No Lead Belly, no Lonnie Donegan. Therefore no Lead Belly, no Beatles." Moreover, Lead Belly's influence has continued into the modern era, with Nirvana and Jack White among those who have covered his songs.



Photos Getty

## T-BONE WALKER

**The man who invented electric blues guitar playing as we know it**

Some blues pundits have opined that Aaron Thibeaux 'T-Bone' Walker laid down the template of pentatonic fretboard shapes that blues guitarists have followed ever since. A huge influence on B.B. King, Walker played mellow, swinging lines and jazzy chords on his hollow-bodied Gibson ES-250. On stage, however, he became the supreme showman, playing the guitar behind his head and doing the 'duck walk' which Chuck Berry copied (along with many of T-Bone's licks). Hugely musical, Walker studied with the same teacher as jazz guitar innovator Charlie Christian, both of whom spearheaded new, electric forms of their respective genres.

## JOHN LEE HOOKER

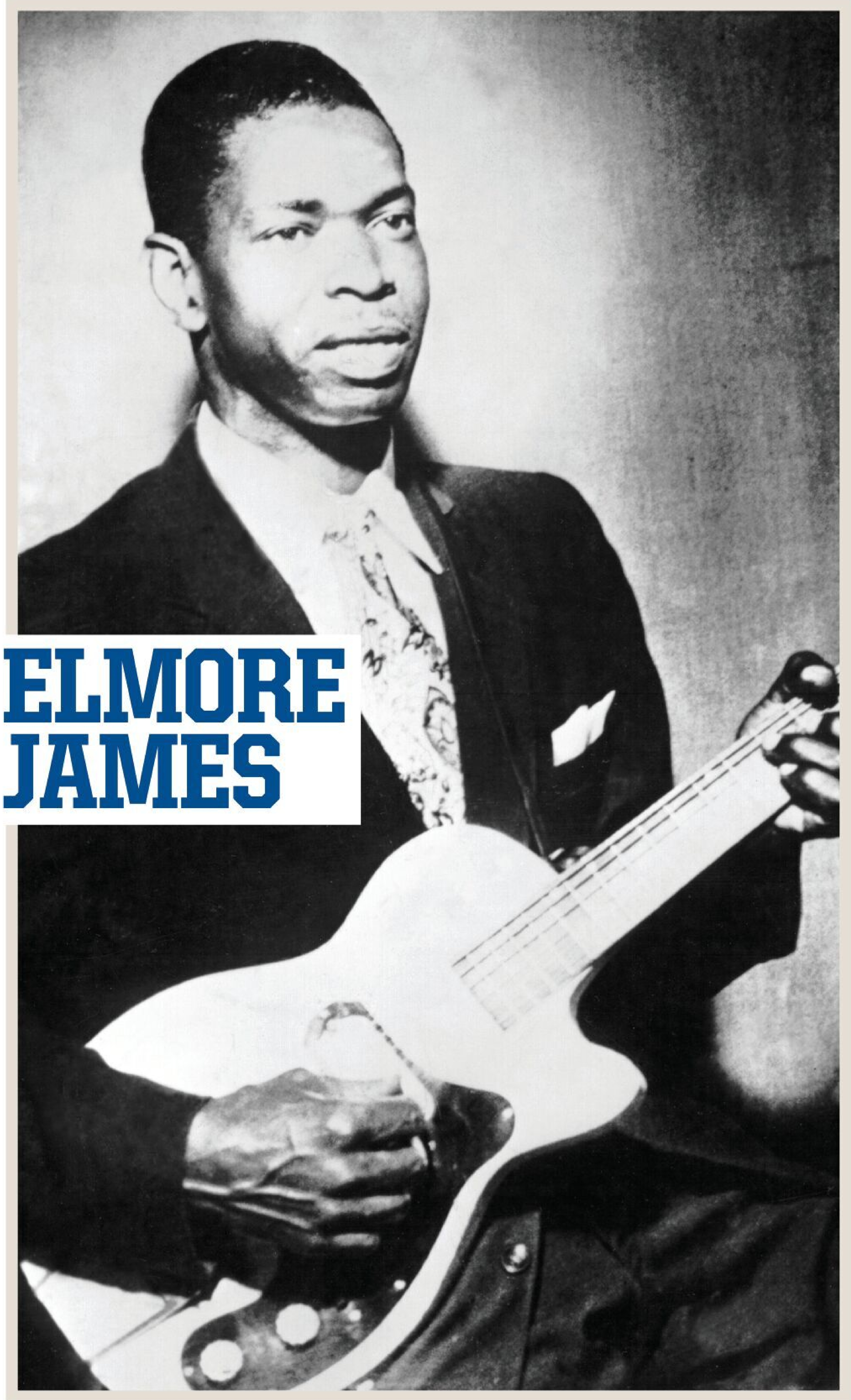
**As low down and dirty as the blues can get**

This son of a Mississippi sharecropper had a musical style that was all his own. Usually playing an Epiphone Emperor while sitting down, Hooker drove the music with simple, open-position licks. Hooker spat out songs with barely hidden innuendo about sex and other basic desires like alcohol and money. Hooker never much cared for time signatures and his band often had to guess when he was changing chords. But if anything this added to his unquestionable authenticity. A true blues giant!

# LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS

## A bolt of blues genius from the heart of Texas

Samuel John 'Lightnin'' Hopkins went from humble beginnings (he constructed his first guitar from a cigar G box, scraps of wood and wire) to become one of the most influential blues guitarists ever. Informed by Blind Lemon Jefferson and hours spent playing without a backing band, Hopkins developed a self-accompanying fingerstyle technique which involved playing bass, rhythm, lead and percussive parts simultaneously. He elevated the 12-bar blues template with his penchant for improvising, elongating the stretches between changes and spinning loose, imaginative licks on his Gibson J-50, which he had fitted with a DeArmond soundhole pickup. His influence would he heard in artists such as Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix.



# ELMORE JAMES

## King of the blues slide guitar

You might know songs like *The Sky Is Crying*, *Shake Your Moneymaker*, *Dust My Blues* and *Bleeding Heart* by Stevie Ray Vaughan, Fleetwood Mac, John Mayall and Jimi Hendrix. But all these and many more were written and originally performed by this fabulous singer and slide guitarist. Elmore's version of *It Hurts Me Too* is perhaps *the* definitive slow 12-bar blues, with its plaintive slide guitar motif and high, moaning vocal. James is also responsible for popularising the 'diddly-diddly-diddly-diddly-dee-dum' slide intro as heard on *Dust My Broom* and many others. It became Elmore's signature, but he was about much more than that. He was one of the biggest influences on the 60s blues revival in both America and the UK, and songs performed by James were relished by bands on both sides of the Atlantic. Guitarists including Jimi Hendrix, Brian Jones (The Rolling Stones), John Mayall, Jeremy Spencer (Fleetwood Mac) and even Frank Zappa mentioned him as an influence. As with so many blues greats it was never all about the guitar with Elmore; instrument and voice played vital roles in delivering his music, and James connected to his audience with both in equal measure. One of the greatest unsung bluesmen ever? We think so.

## HOWLIN' WOLF

### The big bad sound of Chicago blues

Howlin' Wolf was born Chester Arthur Burnett on 10 June 1910 in White Station, Mississippi. His parents named him after the 21st president of the United States, Chester Alan Arthur, who had campaigned for the rights of slaves in New York City.

The young Wolf found a mentor in legendary Delta bluesman Charley Patton, before making a name for himself on the Mississippi scene. Although Wolf never matched Patton in terms of his intricate playing prowess – opting for a chunkier, more simplistic style – he became a wild, larger than life on stage presence, literally. Wolf stood at six feet, three inches tall and weighed almost 300 pounds, and he would often encourage female fans to 'ride' him around on stage, among other antics.

In 1951, his first single *Moanin' At Midnight* became a hit and Wolf headed north to Chicago at the invitation of record label boss, Leonard Chess. Here, alongside Muddy Waters (with whom Wolf sustained a long and heated rivalry), he helped transform the rugged acoustic Delta Blues style into an electrified and wholly modern, urban listening experience with releases such as *Killing Floor* and *Spoonful*. Wolf reached a whole new audience in the 1960s when The Rolling Stones championed his influence upon their sound.

# BB KING

## The undisputed king of electric blues guitar

BB King was pure class, from his exquisite licks to his heartfelt vocals. Brought up on a plantation in Itta Bena, Mississippi, he was born Riley B. King in 1925.

King attended various churches, attracted to the blues-tinged gospel songs they sang. His pastor taught him three chords before his plantation boss advanced him the money to buy his own guitar. King taught himself to play and by 1946 had moved to Memphis with his cousin, slide guitarist Bukka White. Before long he was playing on local radio and scored a residency at a West Memphis grill. King soon gained his own show, where he was dubbed 'Beale Street Blues Boy', shortened to 'Blues Boy' and then 'BB'.

At this time he was still playing acoustic guitar, but influenced by his hero T-Bone Walker, King moved to electric. He initially played a Gibson ES-150, then an ES-5 Switchmaster, even a Fender Esquire, before finding the instrument with which he will forever be associated, the Gibson ES-355 thinline.

King named his guitars 'Lucille', after a fight over a woman of that name caused a burning oil drum heater to overturn. King ran back into the blazing building to retrieve his beloved instrument, and christened it (and every subsequent guitar) in her honour.

Several elements make King's style unique. Prior to King, few guitarists used vibrato with such artistry, but he loved the fluttering sound of slide guitarists such as cousin Bukka White, and the powerful quiver created by blues harmonica player Little Walter. So he developed his own, by quickly rotating his finger while holding down a fretted note. It made his licks sound more vocal, and set him aside from others. Also, King considered his singing and playing equal partners in his success, so rarely played chords while he sang, instead devoting each moment to a sung or played line, thus heightening each one's intensity.

In his early years, King followed the five-shape fingerboard template laid down by T-Bone Walker and others, but before long discovered a fretboard position that suited him perfectly. We now call this 'the BB box'. Essentially 'shape 3' in the pentatonic scheme, King pivoted his first finger on the root note of the key, on the second string – in A this would be 10th fret. From here he could easily reach a 5th above (first string, 12th fret), find b5th and 4th one and two frets down, and 2nd, b3rd and 3rd on the second string, 12th, 13th and 15th frets respectively. One string down on the 11th fret was the major 6th, so all these important notes were easily available within one small area – and that's before we take into account King's incredible string bending.

When the white blues boom of the 1960s exploded, artists like Eric Clapton, The Rolling Stones, and Paul Butterfield used their success to champion their own heroes. Thus artists like King, who had previously been dubbed "race" acts, gained the mainstream appreciation that they rightly deserved.

Photos Getty

**Words** Jenna Scaramanga

# A MAN AND THE BLUES

## Buddy Guy is last of the electric blues pioneers. AG profiles an extraordinary career in five key songs...

Still recording and performing at the age of 86, Buddy Guy has lived the archetypal blues story. His first job was picking cotton in Louisiana before he moved to Chicago at 21. He didn't expect to become a star; he just wanted to live somewhere he could see the greats play. After starving for several months, he lucked into jamming with Otis Rush at the 708 club, where Guy caused such a stir that the owner phoned Muddy Waters to come and watch. With Waters' patronage, Guy quickly landed a record deal, but his early recordings were watered down, without the distortion and feedback he used live. "I told [label boss] Leonard Chess we should get that sound on record," he recalled later. "He just told me, 'Ain't nobody gonna buy that noise, man!'"

Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton did buy that noise, however, and a young Jimi Hendrix once cancelled a show to watch Buddy Guy instead. A spectacular showman, Buddy used his 150 foot cable to begin gigs outside the venue and leap into the crowd. His new album *The Blues Don't Lie* shows Buddy as the last and greatest of the electric blues pioneers. "I promised them all," he remembers, "BB King, Muddy, Sonny Boy – as long as I'm alive, I'm going to keep the blues alive."

### 1 SIT AND CRY

**From The Blues *(1958)***

Buddy arrived in Chicago with a Les Paul Goldtop. Two days before his first recording session, though, the guitar was stolen, changing the course of guitar history. A desperate Guy borrowed $160 from a club owner to buy a Stratocaster, which he used on this, his debut single. The all-star band also included Willie Dixon on bass, second guitarist Otis Rush, and future Chuck Berry sideman Odie Payne on drums. Although the tone is cleaner and more controlled than Guy would have preferred, his lead style was already well developed. At 2:17 there's a turnaround lick that Stevie Ray Vaughan clearly borrowed, and Guy's approach undoubtedly informed Vaughan's version of *Texas Flood*. The riffs to this song and Larry Davis' original *Texas Flood*, released the same year, are similar but Vaughan's lead fills sound more like Guy than Davis. Compared to the likes of BB King, Guy is noticeably busier. The licks between vocal lines have a tumbling quality, tripping over themselves with rhythmic variations. "Didn't mind jammin' notes together in a way that wasn't proper," Buddy wrote later. "Notes crashing into each other was another way to get attention. I learned how to ride high on electricity." The electricity was toned down for the studio, but the notes still crashed into each other.

### 2 MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

**From A Man And The Blues *(1968)***

A reworking of a nursery rhyme is an unpromising premise for a blues classic, but Guy's stonking riff and acrobatic vocals made it a triumph. The way his syncopated chord stabs bounce off the horns shows his time as a session musician at Chess Records had paid off. There's still no sign of the howling distortion he could conjure live, but his Strat sounds big, punchy and clear – there's no sign of the weedy or shrill tones that lesser players can suffer from. A clean amp at that volume is an unforgiving beast, but Guy delivers his licks with authority.

Stevie Ray Vaughan covered this version faithfully on his debut album, even using the same opening lick on his solo. Vaughan, though, sticks to the minor pentatonic, while Guy ventures out into the major at points. This album, *A Man And The Blues*, combined Guy's blues styles with soul much as Albert King had done on *Born Under A Bad Sign*, and the insistent Motown drum pattern and horn arrangement make this a jubilant blues performance.

### 3 ONE ROOM COUNTRY SHACK

**From Live In Montreux *(1978)***

The live album with Junior Wells, *Live In Montreux* (re-released in 1999 as *Everything Gonna Be Alright*) finds Guild-era Guy delivering humbucker-fuelled madness. He throws the kitchen sink at this opening cut, showing that whatever can be said for BB King's 'less is more' philosophy, more can also be more. The licks cascade into each other like someone talking too excitedly to pause for breath, but there's an art to the chaos. At the end of his intro solo, around 1:23, Guy plays a perfectly executed turnaround, a constant stream of notes that nevertheless beautifully highlight the changes underneath. You could listen to the isolated guitar line and still know exactly what chords he's playing over just from the guitar melody.

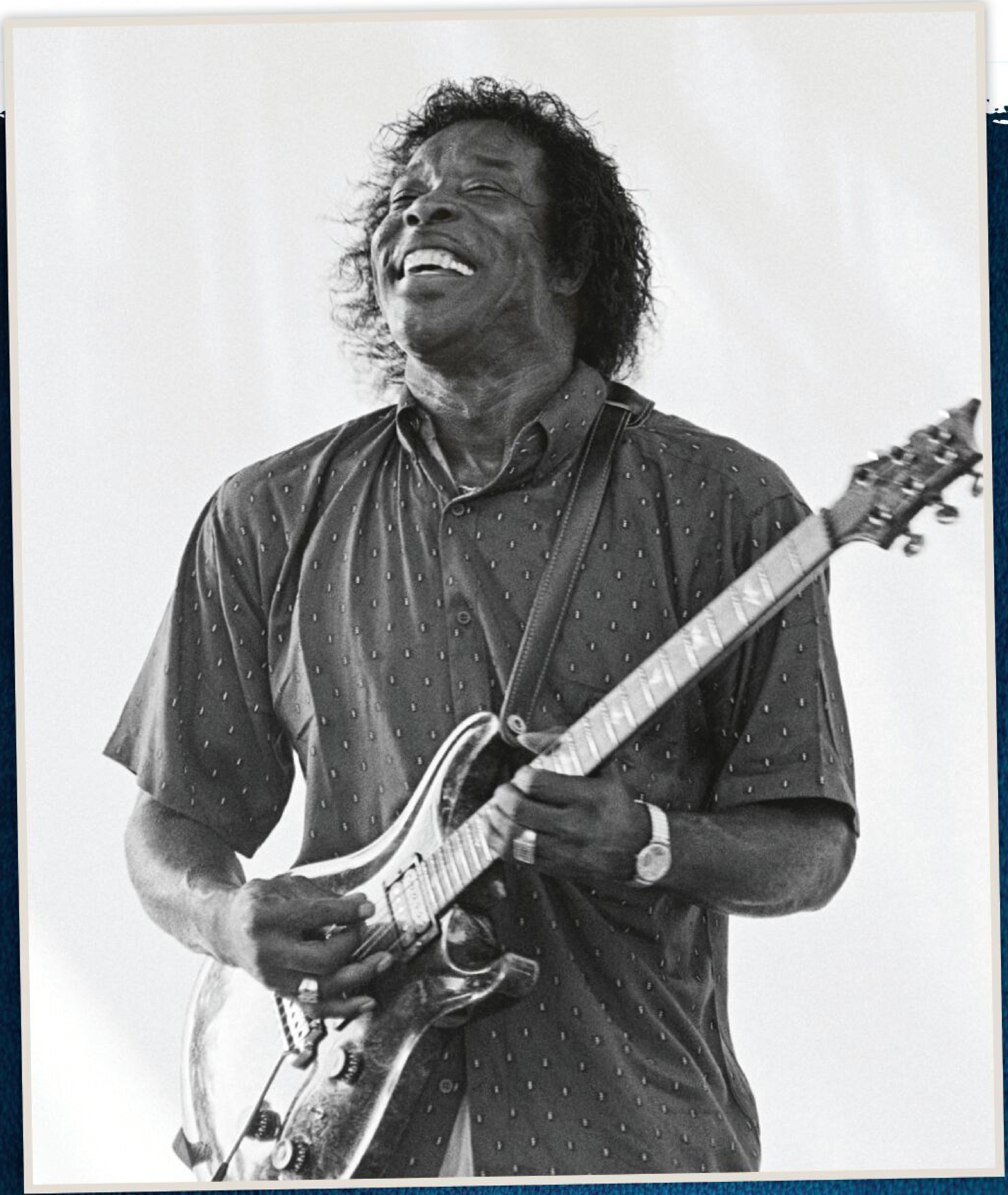
Back in the 60s, Guy had been among the first to spot to the potential of an overdriven amp. "When I heard the buzzin' and the fuzz tones distorting the amps, that didn't bother me none," he wrote in his autobiography. "I figured fuzz tones and distortion added to the excitement of the sound." Live recordings are the only place to hear the vintage Guy with a cooking amp, and here he balances it perfectly on the edge of clarity and sustain.

### 4 DAMN RIGHT, I'VE GOT THE BLUES

**From Damn Right, I've Got The Blues *(1991)***

While the guitarists he influenced became stars, Buddy spent the 70s and 80s in the wilderness, with no record deal in his home country and a relentless gigging schedule. After a performance with Eric Clapton at the Albert Hall, though, Guy was introduced to Silvertone Records boss Andrew Lauder. Signing immediately, Lauder brought in Roxy Music's John Porter to produce, and Guy was finally happy with the sound. "John worked hard to let me sound the way I sound live," said Buddy in his autobiography. "What you

Photo Getty



**GUITAR TALKIN'**
Guy live in Central Park, New York, June 1990.

hear is a man used to wearing handcuffs flying free as a bird."

Guy's Strat tone was dirty yet clear. Guy had pioneered lodging the 3-way switch on his 1958 Strat between positions to get combinations of pickups, and it's those in-between sounds that predominate here. *Damn Right* became the biggest hit of Guy's career, bolstered by guest appearances on the album from Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton and Mark Knopfler. Still, on hearing Guy's potential finally captured on tape it's hard to ignore the missed opportunity. It's a great blues album, but its impact is lessened because it came after *Wheels Of Fire*, *Are You Experienced* and *Texas Flood*. It could and should have been made 30 years earlier, when it would have been truly revolutionary.

## 5 LET MY GUITAR DO THE TALKING

From **The Blues Don't Lie** *(2022)*

Released exactly 65 years since he first arrived in Chicago, 2022's *The Blues Don't Lie* arrives with Buddy receiving something like the recognition he deserves: multiple Grammy Awards, induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and a queue of star collaborators. But on this album opener, Guy takes care of business on his own. Hearing his wah-soaked Strat, it's hard to avoid thinking of Hendrix, but as we've discussed, that comparison is back-to-front. The frenetic tremolo picking and scorching double-string bends show the octogenarian Guy hasn't lost a step, and the scorching tone is among the best he's ever recorded.

Elsewhere on the album, Jason Isbell, James Taylor, and Mavis Staples feature. In many ways, Guy's 21st Century resurgence is similar to the latter stages of Johnny Cash's career: after decades in obscurity, a 1960s legend is revived through collaborations with new talent, all of whom were influenced by the original 60s material. Where Cash's voice grew hauntingly fragile with age, though, Guy's guitar and voice have an intensity that show little sign of waning.

# WISE GUY

What Buddy has learned – in his own words

### PICKING

"No one ever sat me down and showed me how to play anything, even how to hold a pick. Until BB King told me to get a straight pick, I was just playing with my fingers. In fact, I still do, using my fingers and the pick. A lot of the time I just put the pick in the palm of my hand and then swap back and forth, but I don't know how I do it!"

### VOLUME

"When I started recording at Chess, Willie Dixon told me to turn it down; [he] said I was too loud. Then they all heard Cream and Hendrix and saw how many albums they were selling, and decided that perhaps it wasn't such a bad thing after all!"

### SLIDE

"I always wanted to play slide. I used to see this guy called Earl Hooker [John Lee Hooker's cousin] who played the best slide I've ever heard. I had a bottleneck but I actually gave it to him because he was so good that I felt embarrassed trying!"

### GUITAR ABUSE

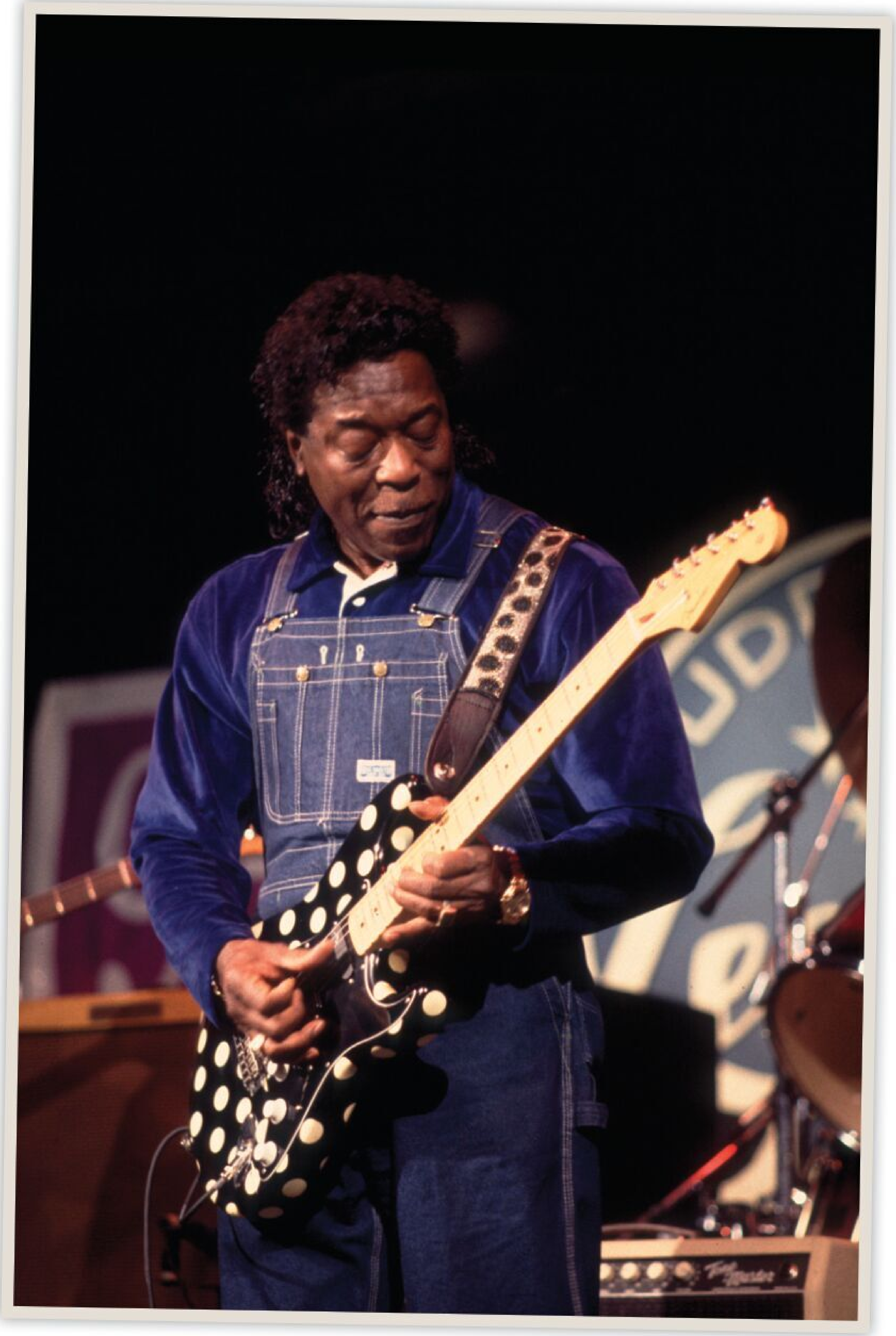
"The Guild that I got given back in 1967 was the first endorsement that I had; I never thought that anyone would give me a guitar, but I always loved Stratocasters. I was wild and crazy. I used to throw it down on the floor – something I couldn't do with the Guild – and one time in 1969 it flew off the top of the car I was travelling in. But apart from a few scratches it was fine!"

### LIVING THE BLUES

"The cognac they make in France has to stay in the bottle for 100 years before they put it out there. I guess you could look at a blues guitar player the same way. So if you don't have the blues yet, just keep living!"

# GUY'S GUITARS

## The gear that gave Buddy his signature sound



### 1958 FENDER STRATOCASTER

Buddy's first Strat, bought new in 1958 for $159, has the very rare combination of a 3-tone sunburst body with one-piece maple neck. He used it almost exclusively until it was stolen on the road in the 70s. Guy superfan Bobby DeVito sold it back to him in 1995.

### 1959 FENDER BASSMAN

The tweed Bassman was just for bass until Buddy discovered its magic for guitar. He runs everything on 10 except the bass at around 2 o'clock, and controls everything from the guitar. With no overdrive pedal, all his distortion comes from pushing the amp. He now uses a replica with a cabinet built from the oak countertop of a local store in his hometown of Lettsworth, Louisiana.

### BUDDY GUY SIGNATURE WAH

Decorated by Dunlop in Guy's signature polka dot design, the wah is the only pedal in Buddy's rig. Of its two modes, 'deep' and 'BG', the latter is the singing Buddy Guy sound.

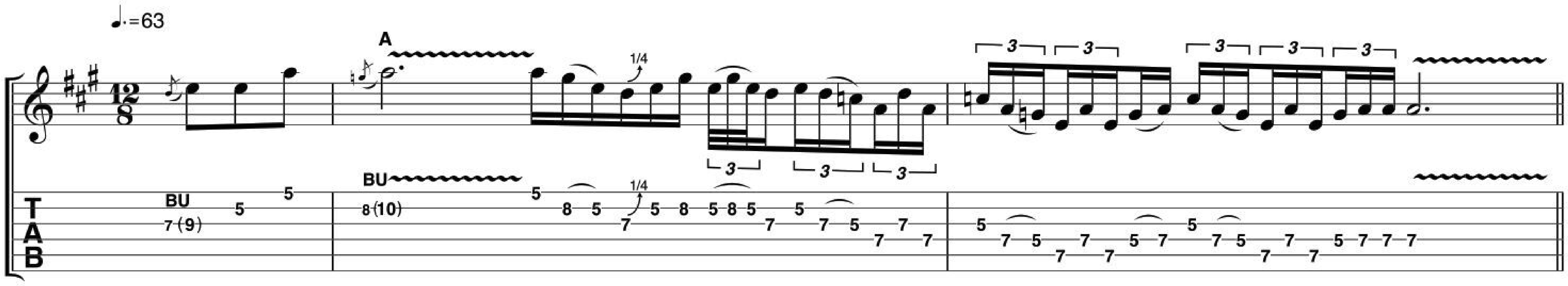
### GUILD STARFIRE IV

Buddy was a Guild endorsee through the 70s and 80s. He'd always been a fan of semi-acoustics thanks to BB King, and the hollow construction fed his feedback addiction. Hear it on his *Live In Montreux* album with Junior Wells. He only went back to Strats because they were more robust for touring.

### 1989 FENDER CUSTOM SHOP STRAT

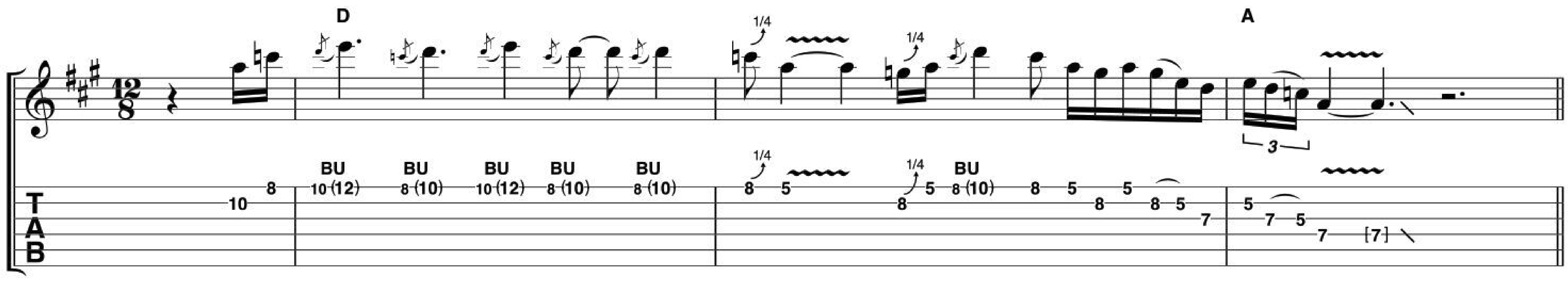
The first Buddy Guy signature Strats were based on the Clapton models after Buddy borrowed Eric's guitar and liked the tone from the Lace Sensor pickups and active mid boost. His blonde 1989 one, now with Vintage Noiseless pickups, is his main touring axe.

**TRIPLING THE BLUES**

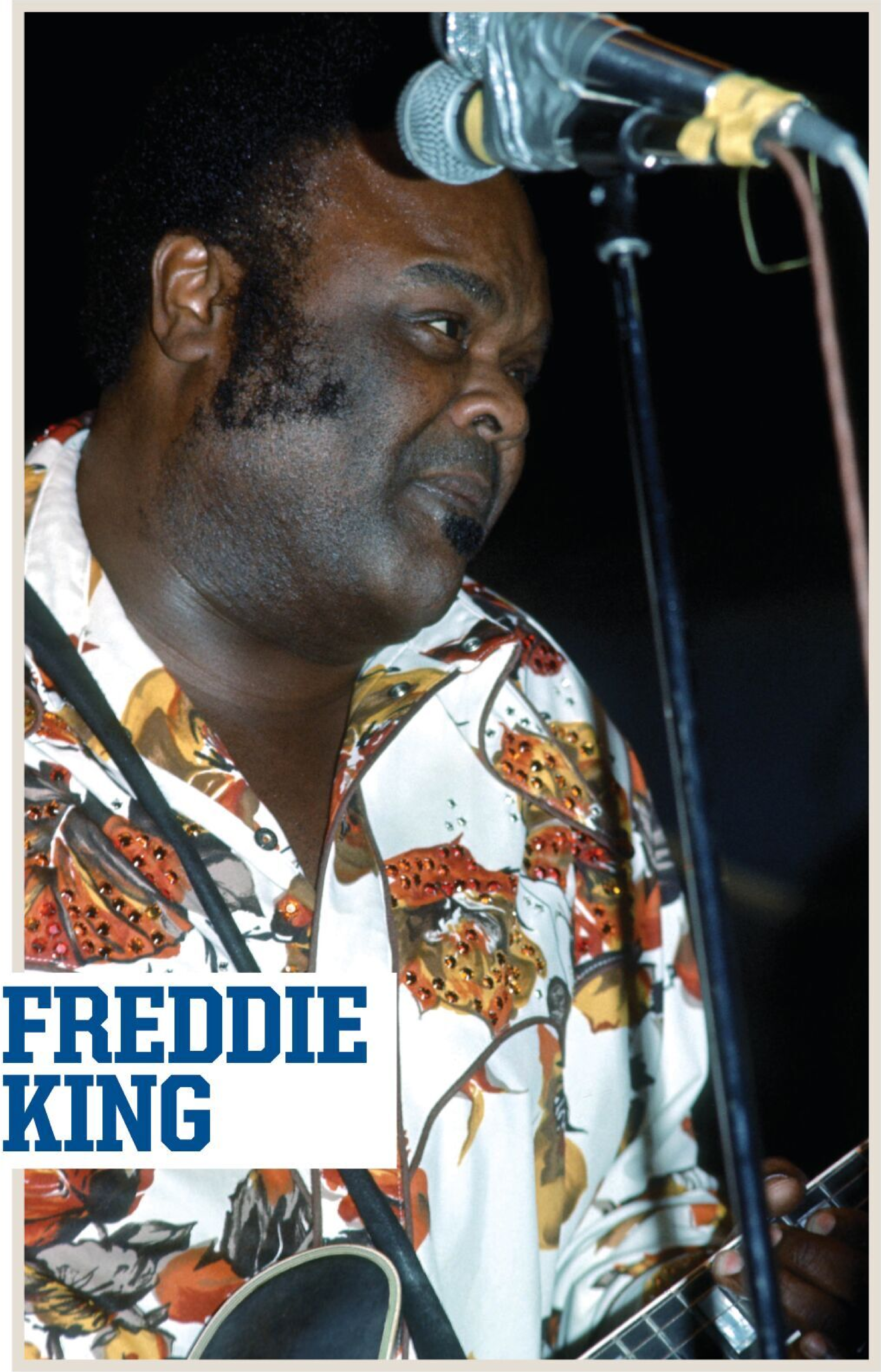


At first glance, nobody would blame you for being concerned at all those 16th-note triplets, but if you work through this lick slowly you'll see that it stays within the A minor pentatonic scale (A C D E G) without any unpredictable jumps. Think of it as a highly embellished but loose blues run rather than a super-accurate shred lick.

**BEND IT LIKE BUDDY**



After the two pickup notes, bar 1 is all about getting the most out of those bends. If you happen to catch the second string too, so much the better – this is definitely not about being neat and tidy, and it'll give you a nice bluesy dissonant clash. The second half should fall into place if you've spent some time on our previous lick



# FREDDIE KING

## The Texas Cannonball – the meanest picker in town!

Of the legendary 'Three Kings', Freddie was the youngest and most raucous. His guitar style was fast and ferocious, with huge string bends and vicious vibrato, his vocals almost guttural in their delivery.

Born in Gilmer, Texas in 1934, Freddie learned guitar from age six, but moved to Chicago while in his teens. Freddie would sneak into the blues clubs and watch legends like Muddy Waters, Elmore James and T-Bone Walker. He took onboard their stagecraft, marvelled at their musicianship and determined to make it big, just like them. But after continual rejection by Chess Records on Chicago's South Side he finally struck a deal with Federal Records on the city's West Side, where a hipper blues scene was burgeoning. Freddie became a hit in the clubs here, and his first single for Federal would become a standard – *Have You Ever Loved A Woman*, later a staple in Eric Clapton's career.

Freddie influenced a raft of later white guitarists, like Clapton, Peter Green, Michael Bloomfield and Stevie Ray Vaughan. His instrumentals became legendary – *Hide Away*, *The Stumble* and *San-Ho-Zay*, among others – and he will also be remembered for having one of the first mixed race bands. Freddie was hard working and hard living, and died of pancreatitis, aged just 42.

### ALBERT KING

**The Velvet Bulldozer, a literal giant of the blues**

Born Albert Nelson in 1923, Albert King stood 6' 4" and weighed 250lbs. Like BB (no relation, although Albert often fudged the reality), was born on and worked on a cotton plantation in Indianola, Texas.

King fashioned his first guitar from a cigar box, with a tree branch neck and strung it with a strand of broom wire. When he finally got a guitar, being left-handed he simply turned the right-hander upside down and played with the strings reversed. He also tuned very loosely – Gary Moore told *Guitarist* magazine that while working with King he took a sneaky peak and found it to be C# F# B E G# C#.

This down-stringing made his action very pliable. Albert could play a whole lick by bending his top string by a 4th and letting it down to create other intervals.

After various attempts at a record deal he moved to Memphis and was signed by soul label Stax, with superb house band Booker T & The MG's. The MG's backed King on his legendary 1967 album *Born Under A Bad Sign* which contained the brilliant *Crosscut Saw*, *The Hunter* (covered by Free), *Oh Pretty Woman* (covered by Gary Moore) and the title track (covered by Cream).

Nicknamed The Velvet Bulldozer due to his huge size but sweet singing voice, Albert played simply but beautifully on his 1958 Gibson Flying V. You can hear huge slabs of him in the playing of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and Joe Walsh among others.

# JOHNNY WINTER

## The Texan whose Firebird lit up blues-rock with thumbpickin' heat

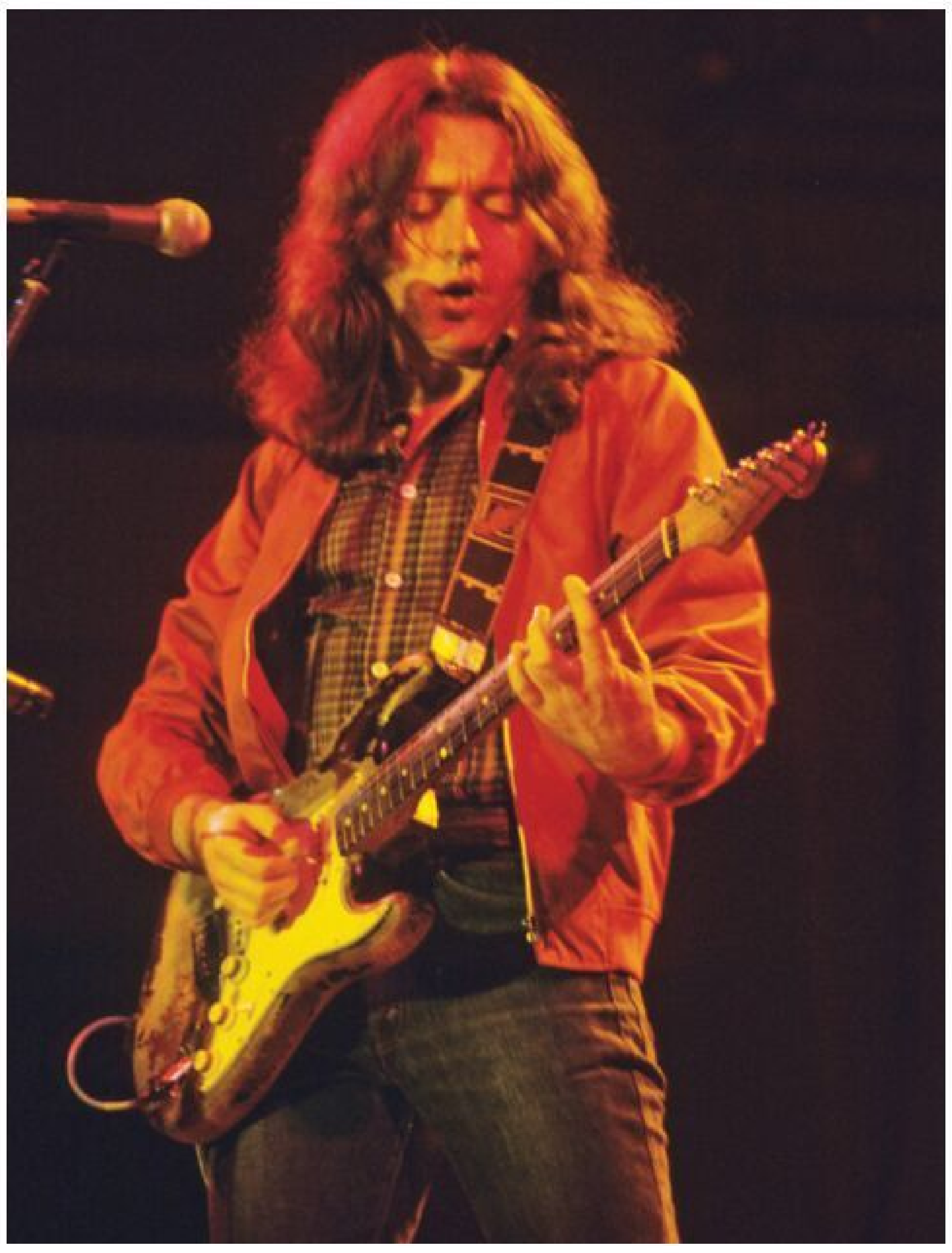
There was always something otherworldly about Johnny Winter, as though he had one foot in this life and one in the next. The rake-thin Texan with the long blond hair and Gibson Firebird was all angles. And his style was all action, all attitude. He had the voice to match, too. Winter approached the electric guitar differently to most blues players, preferring a thumb pick and applying a country-esque, Chet Atkins-style approach to blues-rock, and would glean insight not just from blues guitar practitioners but from mouth organ licks, expanding his vocabulary on the guitar, and taking blues-rock forward.

Winter started out young, and his big break arrived in 1968 when Mike Bloomfield invited him to play with him at New York City's Fillmore East, where the suits from Columbia Records were in attendance and could not help but notice Winter's capacity for showmanship on a performance of BB King's *It's My Own Fault*. They signed him, offering winter a record $600,000 advance.

Winter's legacy was writ large on not just how he played the guitar but how he recorded it, having tracked a trio of Muddy Waters albums in the late 1970s, also playing some guitar as well as producing.

## RORY GALLAGHER

### The blues-rock powerhouse who gave the art form a Celtic flavour



Great blues players always have the whiff of legend about them. There's something about biographical apocrypha that ennobles their art, like the story that Gallagher played the first Fender Stratocaster ever sold in Ireland. It's quite possibly true – the esteemed Dave Hunter suggests as much in his book *Ultimate Star Guitars: The Guitars That Rocked The World*. But what really matters is how Gallagher played this 1961 model, and how he treated it. This was a guitar that looked like Gallagher sounded; a Sunburst relic'd raw by hard miles on the road.

He threw everything at it, powerchord riffs, saucing the pentatonic scale with notes from the minor scale, a fiery slide technique that ebbed and flowed and held the audience's emotions in its travel. Gallagher was similarly adept with an acoustic guitar. Check out the virtuosic *Just The Smile*, a track that brought Americana together with Celtic folk elements. Gallagher influenced everyone and anyone who heard him play. Most notably, his use of a Vox AC30 with a treblebooster in front inspired Brian May to do likewise. To follow in his footsteps is to similarly commit to high-volume tube amp tone and the temperament to bring it to heel.

**Words** Tim Tucker

# HOW JIMI PLAYED THE BLUES

## His mastery of the art in five landmark tracks

In the tradition of many itinerant bluesmen before him, Jimi Hendrix spent his formative years travelling around North America, from his upbringing in Vancouver and Seattle, down to the birthplace of the blues, the Deep South. "I was largely influenced by blues artists when I first started," he said, picking up inspiration from his father's record collection and other musicians. "The first guitarist I was aware of was Muddy Waters. I heard one of his old records when I was a little boy and it scared me to death. Wow, what is that all about?"

It was in the South, though, as a professional musician on the 'chitlin' circuit', that he developed his unique musical style, fused from a combination of Delta blues, R&B, rock 'n' roll and soul. He encountered many blues musicians on the way, including Albert King, who made a considerable impact on Hendrix's artistic development.

When his new manager Chas Chandler brought him to England, it was no surprise that the preeminent guitarists of the British Blues boom, including Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Brian Jones, considered him the real deal. He was immediately recognised as inspiration, competition, and a visionary pointing to the future of blues music.

And what a future that was: loud, sensitive, joyous, agonised and cosmic in its scope. The new blues sound Jimi forged was inspired by the electric performances of blues greats like Buddy Guy, channelled through the latest technology, including his Fuzzface distortion, Vox Wah pedal and 100 Watt Marshall stacks. It was a sound like nothing ever heard before.

Throughout his career, Hendrix incorporated all the blues guitar trademarks in his own inimitable style: simultaneous lead and rhythm playing, pentatonic licks, emotive trills, screeching solos and blistering shred-like runs. But more than anything, it was the feel of the blues that Hendrix inherited and passed on to a new generation.

As legendary blues guitarist John Lee Hooker said, quoted in the original CD booklet for the *Hendrix Blues* album: "He could play the hard blues. Anybody can put the clothes on, but everyone can't produce it. It's got to come from the soul. He was the greatest guitar player that was ever born. I can't say enough about him. He could play deep blues."

### 1 RED HOUSE

**From Los Angeles Forum: April 26, 1969** ***(2022)***

This Hendrix original first saw the light of day on the UK version of the Jimi Hendrix Experience's debut album, *Are You Experienced*. According to Hendrix it was excluded from the American release because he was told 'Americans don't like blues, man.' It was the first 12-bar blues of many that he would record, and immediately showcased his loose, effortless style, with notes, phrases and chords tumbling from his fingers. The song became a live favourite, prompting some of his longest onstage jams, very often going over ten minutes in length.

The version on the newly released *Los Angeles Forum* set was recorded during the band's last North American tour. Starting at a comfortable slow tempo, Jimi plays gentle arpeggios and sweet melodies on his 1968 Fender Stratocaster. The pace picks up in intensity, when Mitch Mitchell's drums thunder forward and Jimi pushes his futuristic fuzz and wah sound into the stratosphere. Later the band go into a jazz swing feel and Hendrix experiments with partial chord playing and funky scratching on muted strings, before returning with his sweet crying tone to see the song out.

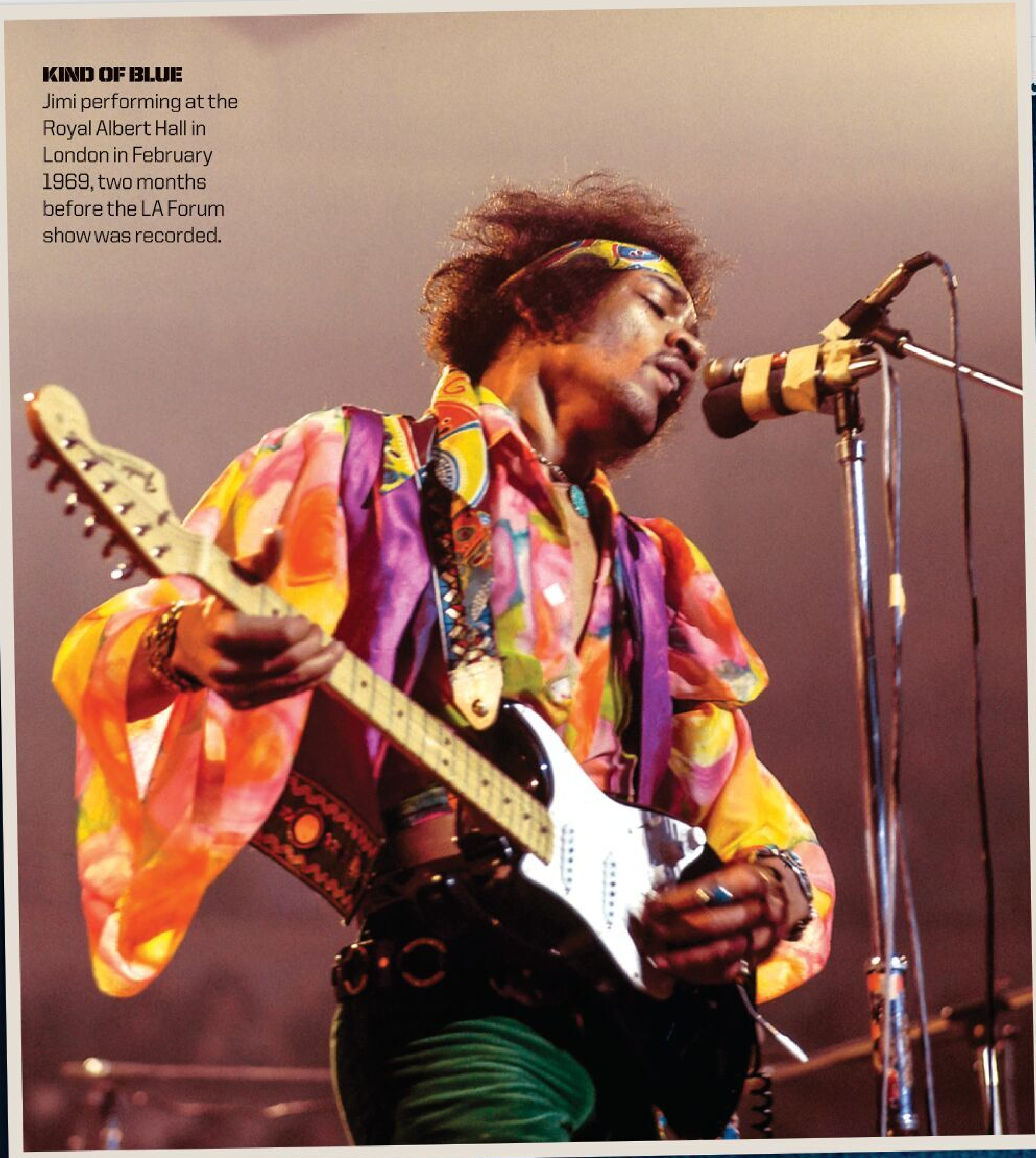
Photo Getty

### 2 VOODOO CHILE

**From Electric Ladyland** ***(1968)***

Starting life as a version of the Muddy Waters-inspired *Catfish Blues*, this song was renamed by Hendrix after a review in *Rolling Stone* dubbed his last album 'the finest voodoo album that any rock group has ever produced.' There are plenty of legends about Hendrix's involvement with voodoo, including claims he developed his extraordinary guitar playing prowess after engaging in shamanic ceremonies in the Deep South blues scene, echoing legends of Robert Johnson's pact with the devil.

This early morning all-star jam session featured some of the best blues-inspired musicians of the rock scene, including Jack Cassady on bass and Traffic's Stevie Winwood on organ. Over 15 minutes of improvisation, Hendrix trades licks with Winwood, a blues master himself. The two virtuosos drive each other to greater heights, with Hendrix occasionally lifting off from planet Earth into another stratosphere



**KIND OF BLUE**
Jimi performing at the Royal Albert Hall in London in February 1969, two months before the LA Forum show was recorded.

through his soaring lead breaks. British writer Charles Shaar Murray called the performance 'a chronological guided tour of blues styles'. A day later it yielded *Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*, one of Hendrix's most enduringly popular recordings.

## 3 HEAR MY TRAIN A COMIN'

From **Blues *(1994)***

This Hendrix original, which he often referred to as *Getting My Heart Back Together Again*, was recorded live and in the studio at various times, but never officially released during his lifetime. The opening track on the posthumous *Blues* album features an acoustic version, recorded in December 1967 during a photo session for the filming of the documentary *Experience* (1968). The impromptu performance occurred when Hendrix picked up a nearby Zemaitis 12-string acoustic guitar, in standard C tuning, that happened to be strung for a left hander.

It's one of only two recorded examples of Hendrix's acoustic guitar playing, made all the more remarkable in that it's played on a 12-string acoustic. His dexterity with this unwieldy instrument provides a tantalising glimpse of what he could do with an acoustic, with triple time phrasing in the style of Tommy Johnson, and humming accompaniment in the John Lee Hooker style. The result is as close to authentic country blues as Hendrix got.

The final track on the Blues album is the definitive electric rendition of the same song, recorded live at the Berkeley Community Theatre in May 1970 with Billy Cox on bass and Mitch Mitchell on drums. The tempo is slow, the beat heavy, and Hendrix is at the height of his powers, commanding his classic 1968 white Stratocaster with alternating blues licks, chromatic runs and crying melodies.

> "JIMI COULD PLAY THE HARD BLUES. HE COULD PLAY DEEP BLUES"
>
> John Lee Hooker

## 4 KILLING FLOOR

From **Live at Monterey *(1967)***

The moment Hendrix broke through in his homeland is captured on this recording of the legendary Monterey concert. Introduced by Brian Jones of The Rolling Stones as 'the most exciting guitar player I've ever heard', Hendrix appeared before an audience that barely knew him. By the end of his set, he'd pointed the way forward for blues rock.

Although The Who had played an explosive set earlier in the evening, they were followed by a relatively sedate forty minutes of psychedelic noodling by The Grateful Dead. So when Jimi kicked off with his take on the Howlin' Wolf blues classic *Killing Floor*, the audience was awakened to the presence of something entirely new. While white English musicians had been doing their best to reproduce the blues style of Chicago, Hendrix at once identified himself with its past, present and future: tripling the tempo, quadrupling the volume, before setting fire to it and birthing something completely fresh from its remains.

On this opening song of his set, Hendrix effortlessly shifts from rhythmic attack to throwaway licks and incendiary lead breaks, pushing his 1965/66 Black Fender Stratocaster way beyond its limits. Later on he switched to the hand-painted 1963/64 Strat for the shocking climax of his set, setting fire to his instrument and changing rock music forever.

## 5 CATFISH BLUES

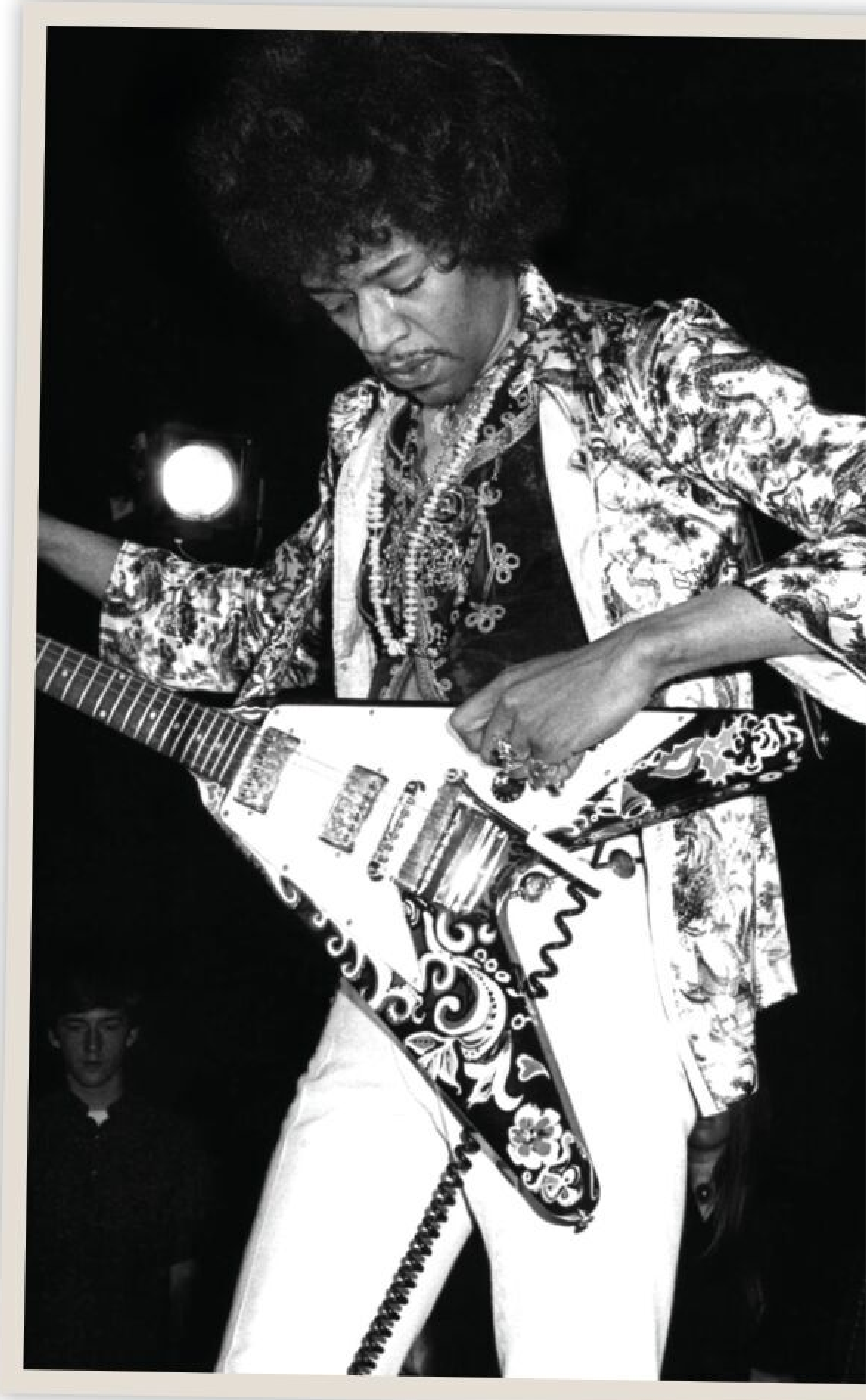
From **Blues *(1994)***

The Jimi Hendrix Experience recorded this blazing take of a traditional blues song in November 1967 at Vitus Studios, Bussem, Holland. This interpretation is inspired by Muddy Waters, starting with a slow, grinding groove, flamboyant trills and the sharp, abrasive riff, mixing in melody lines in unison with his vocal.

At 2:25 he starts to take it in a new direction, with partial chords and screaming lead runs, before reigning it back in and dropping out for Mitch Mitchell's drum solo. At 5:25, Hendrix returns in full force, with his wah pedal and whammy bar providing fresh inspiration. At 6:30 he instigates a double-time gallop towards the song's incendiary finale, his guitar howling at full volume as it crashes to a close.

# JIMI'S GEAR

Jimi's blues gear could be quite different from his rock rigs



### 1951 EPIPHONE FT 79

Hendrix owned this for nearly three years, longer than any other guitar, picking it up in New York shortly after his Monterey Pop appearance. The unclear but footage is he appears to use it for a version of *Hound Dog* in one of only two known videos of him playing an acoustic.

### 1960S ZEMAITIS 12-STRING

The mesmerising acoustic performance of *Hear My Train A Comin'* that opens *Blues* employed this hand-built model by luthier Tony Zemaitis. It's tuned down to C standard for that Leadbelly-style recording. Little else is known about it, but some wood shavings purportedly from the guitar sold at auction for £90 in 2019.

### DALLAS ARBITER FUZZ FACE

The secret of many of Jimi's sought after clean tones, such as the *Voodoo Chile* intro, is that he left his Fuzz Face on and rolled off his guitar volume. The Fuzz Face cleans up beautifully and adds a unique sparkle to the sound. Both germanium and silicon fuzzes work.

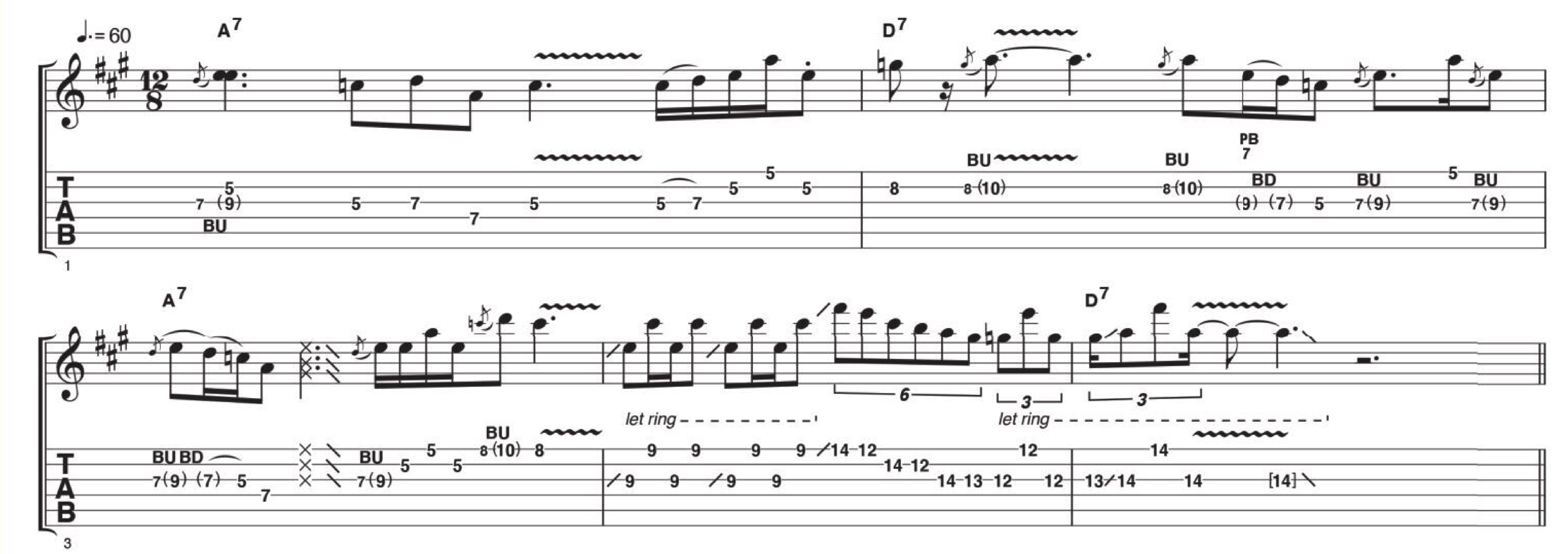
### FENDER DUAL SHOWMAN

Multiple sources, including producer Eddie Kramer, agree Hendrix recorded with Fender amps, notably on *Voodoo Chile*. Sadly Kramer has told the same story about several amps, also mentioning Bassmans and Twins. The Dual Showman appeared on stage with Jimi though, notably at Monterey and on his 1968 US tour. Jimi's early Marshall JTM45s also used a modified Fender circuit.

### GIBSON FLYING V

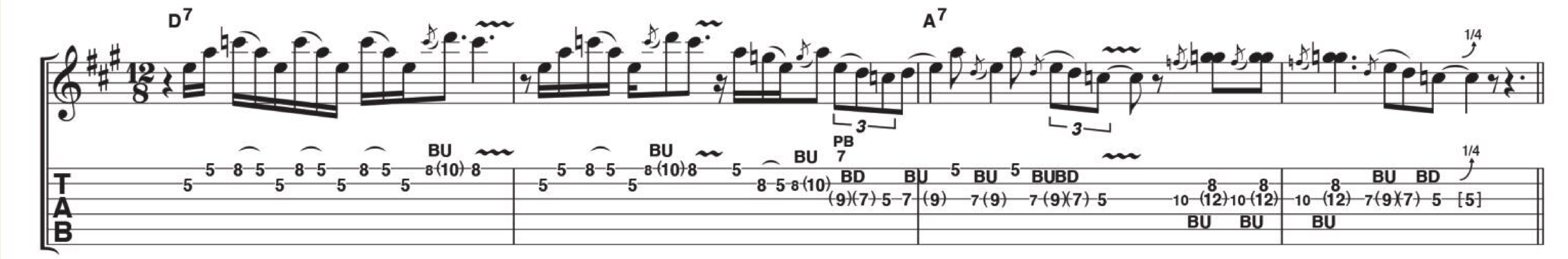
Despite his love of the Strat, Jimi would often reach for the Flying V in his bluesiest moments. *Red House* and *Catfish Blues* in particular almost always came from the Flying V. Jimi was a fan of fellow left-hander Albert King, and replaced him as the V's most famous exponent.

**FLUENT DELIVERY**

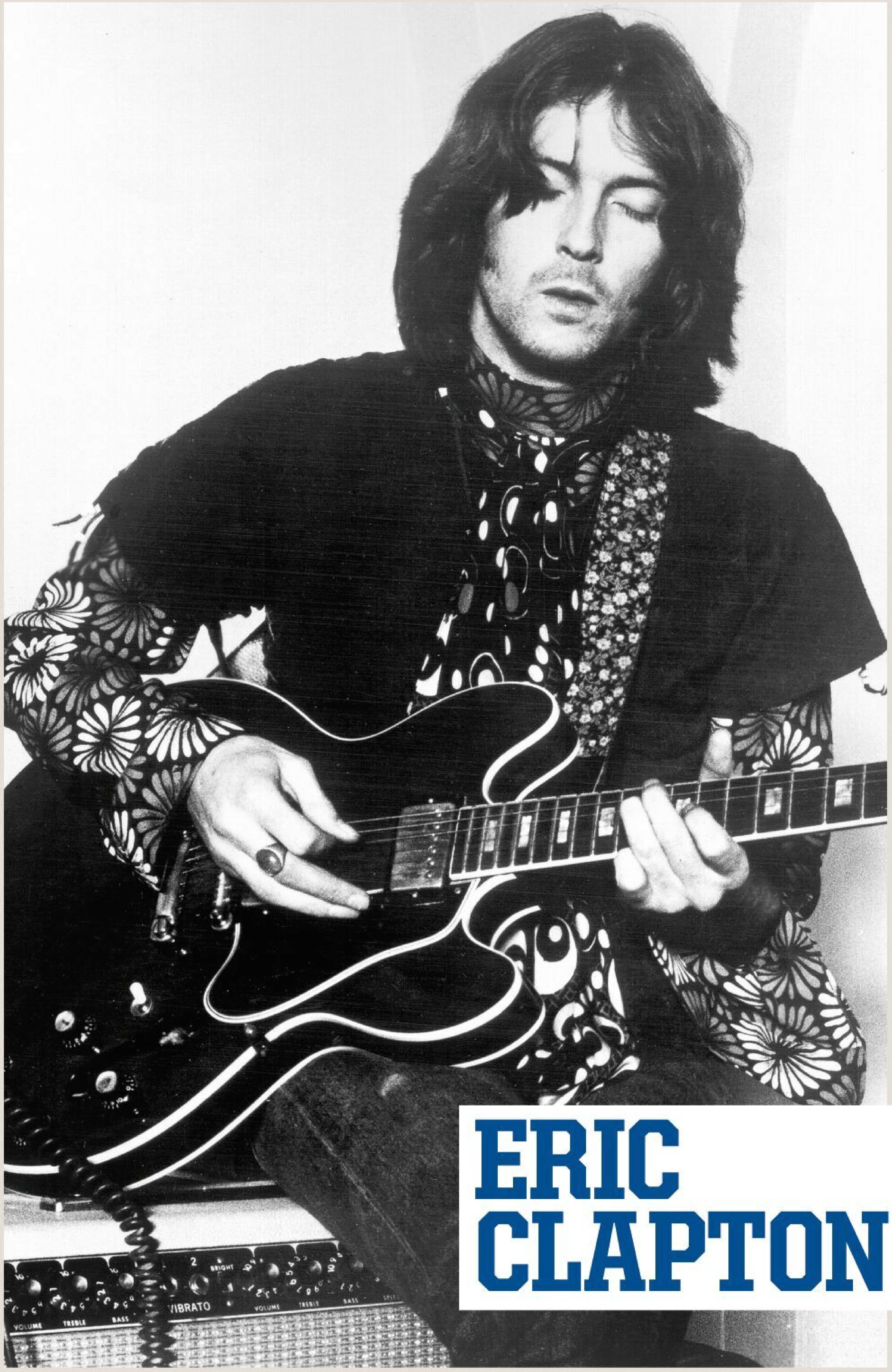


There are a few tricks at play here, giving a loose but fluid Hendrix-like sound in our first lick. Most important is that nearly every note lasts for its full duration and there are very few rests in the music – a great way to fill out the sound in a three-piece lineup. The ringing two-note shapes in bars 4 and 5 also help give a bigger, rounder sound.

**USING REPETITION**



Repetition might not sound all that exciting as a concept, but it's something most of the great blues players use to some extent – you can't just play non-stop, unrelenting widdly pentatonics, after all! Our initial repeating part is a three-note idea found in bar 1. Bar 2 briefly restates the idea, before bars 3 and 4 take it somewhere new.



# ERIC CLAPTON

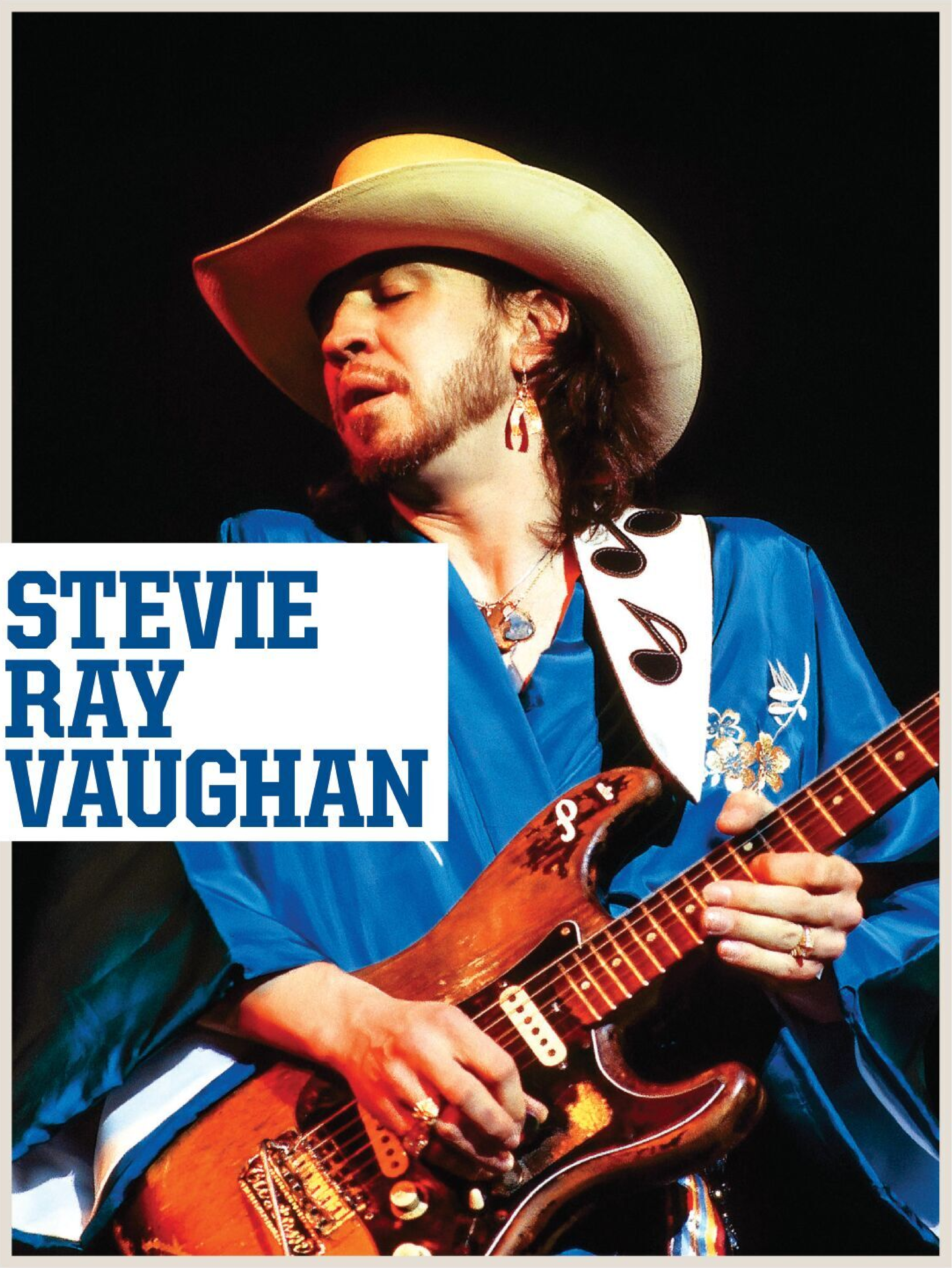
## The man they called "God"

The writing on the walls of 1960s London said everything: "Clapton Is God". Theologically unsound? Sure. But back then Clapton was providing plenty of evidence. He introduced himself with The Yardbirds before leaving for John Mayall And The Bluesbreakers. The band's studio debut, simply titled *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton* but most commonly known as The Beano Album, remains a touchstone. But more greatness was incoming, and Clapton was in a hurry. He formed Cream with fellow Bluesbreakers alumnus Jack Bruce and cut some of the most classic rock tracks of all time. The Marshall stack was expanding the possibilities, and Clapton's 'woman tone' brought the electric guitar – in this instance his 1964 Gibson SG – closer to a soul singer's voice than anyone had got before. After Cream came the short-lived supergroup Blind Faith, before he recorded his masterpiece, *Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs* with Derek And The Dominos in 1970. Solo success, addiction and redemption followed. A disciple of the electric blues progenitors, Muddy Waters *et al*, and of Robert Johnson, Clapton immersed himself in blues history – an education that informed his playing across his career. The vibrato, however, that was all him. And it is godly.

### PETER GREEN

**The original Mac daddy and a Bluesbreaker with peerless feel**

Clapton had left the Bluesbreakers, and those with their eye to a cresting British blues guitar scene looked at John Mayall as though God had abandoned him. Mayall knew better. He placed his faith in a new hot-shot player. His name was Peter Green and when he came along it was like the Second Coming. Just two of Green's tracks, *The Same Way* and *The Supernatural*, made it onto A Hard Road, his 1967 Bluesbreakers debut – but the latter in particular was a thrilling introduction, later becoming a canonical work of blues guitar. Green moved on, forming Fleetwood Mac in '67. Over four studio albums, he established the Mac as the premier British blues-rock band. His 1959 Les Paul Standard, aka Greeny, later owned by Gary Moore and now by Kirk Hammett, was key to his sound, its reversed neck humbucker offering an out-of-phase sound that was not of this earth, up there with the birds on Albatross, the perfect voicing for a visionary player. Green flew too close to the sun with LSD, and ultimately his career waned, but the tributes that greeted his death in 2020 were evidence his influence remained undimmed in his years out of the spotlight.



# STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

## The pride of Texas was the ultimate screamer of tubes

Stevie Ray Vaughan brought physicality and soul to guitar playing, and he brought it in spades. The soul came through the speaker. The physicality was there for all to see. To watch him play, there were occasions in which SRV would throttle the guitar as though it were an arm wrestling contest at last orders in a Nantucket alehouse. His strings were the stuff of legend – 13s? No, 14s; 17s! Heck, some might argue he used piano wire. Either way, he went down the heavy-gauge route and had the dexterity to manipulate them as though they were dental floss. This, the fire in his belly, and the tone-gussying Tube Screamer playing mediator between Fender Strat and amp give him a range of dynamics that few, if any, players could match.

And yet, there was a tenderness to his playing. There are many who argue that his cover of Jimi Hendrix's *Little Wing* eclipses the original. That's for debate. What is not is that Vaughan, who was only 35 years old when he died in a helicopter crash, he left an over-sized impression on guitar culture in a short space of time. Just like Hendrix.

His debut studio album with backing band Double Trouble, *Texas Flood*, remains a blue-chip classic of the genre, and showcases the range of those dynamics. That title track – a cover of the 1958 Larry Davis number – could convince you that the sun never shines on Texas, least not while Vaughan was in it. The likes of *Pride And Joy* and *Tell Me* demonstrate what he could do with a groove behind him. Sadly, generations won't get to see him onstage, but so long as sets such as those at Montreux in 1982 are available on YouTube and DVD, more will bear witness to this singular talent.

Photos Getty

### GARY MOORE

**The heavy rocker who went back to his roots**

In 1966, when Gary Moore was just 14, he was already a self-professed 'blues snob', playing guitar in local bands in his hometown of Belfast. During the late 70s and 80s, with Thin Lizzy and as a solo artist, Moore dazzled as a shredder. But in 1990 he returned to his first love with *Still Got The Blues*, a totemic work of electric blues featuring George Harrison, Albert Collins and Albert King, while 1995's *Blues For Greeny* was another high-water mark, a heartfelt tribute to Peter Green, tracked with the legendary '59 Les Paul Standard he bought from his hero.

# JOE BONAMASSA

## The undisputed blues superstar and gear hound of the 21st-century

You kind of get the impression from Joe Bonamassa that his position as the highest-grossing blues artist of all time is a little embarrassing – thrilling, sure, but it's quite the affirmation. Perhaps this is why he has made it his life's mission to widen the blues' appeal. There's the KTBA blues cruise, the label, the production, Nerdville... But ultimately, Bonamassa leads with his fingers when it comes to advocacy, toting a muscular, pyrotechnic style that not only references the 60s British blues scene, and the pantheon of electric blues greats, and classic rock and prog when the song requires it.

## DEREK TRUCKS

**The best slide player in the world right now**

As the nephew of Allman Brothers' drummer Butch Trucks, Derek Trucks had music in his blood. He started out young, but has barely taken a pause since joining the Allman Brothers in 1999, and over the years has developed a slide technique that has found its spiritual home in the soulful, pluralistic styles of the Tedeschi Trucks Band. Typically parking his Dickey Betts signature SG in open E, using a glass slide and just fingers, Trucks has a nigh-on supernatural command of dynamics, his guitar a foil to wife, Susan Tedeschi's vocals, cutting loose when its time to jam. And in TTB, they make the time.

## JOHN MAYER

**Radio-friendly unit shifter with a gourmand's taste for tone**

There are overachievers and overachievers, and then you've got someone like John Mayer, the Berklee dropout who has harnessed a virtuoso talent in service of songs that speak to the internet guitar geek and the pop fan alike. He has helped reestablish the guitar's profile at the apex of popular music. When he is not out jamming Grateful Dead classics with Dead & Company, Mayer is pulling out his signature PRS Silver Sky, various vintage Strats and Martin acoustics – subliminally indoctrinating the world at large to blues-based guitar culture – and performing solo material that's gilded by this classic sense of tone and feel.

# GARY CLARK JR.

## The socially conscious polymath redefining blues for the next generation

Gary Clark Jr is a blues player but you might not have said that 30 years ago; the tent would not be big enough to accommodate all his stylistic turns through rock, folk, soul, and – look away, purists – hip-hop. But what is blues if not protest music and storytelling in verse, just like hip-hop? Clark's talent lies in bringing all this together without it making a curate's egg of it all. A song such as *Your Land* shows exactly what he is about, referencing Woody Guthrie, drawing a line through American history to confront the racism of today, and doing so with celebratory power. That's where he is coming from philosophically. Tone-wise, his guitar sounds like electricity that's geysering out of the earth. Whether he is using the Epiphone Casino or SG, his tone sounds godly, typically running his guitar through a Vibro-King, and referencing electric blues trailblazers such as Muddy Waters in refreshing and vital new contexts. Clark understands that blues is a contradiction unto itself, an art that must venerate its past and preserve its traditions, and yet be brave enough to imagine its future. That is the urgent business that Clark is engaged in.

Photo Getty

### ERIC GALES

**Joe Bonamassa calls him the world's best blues-rock player**

A child prodigy whose career was forestalled by substance abuse and a stint in jail, Eric Gales is soundtracking his redemption with a blues-rock style that is pure fire. Acquiring Joe Bonamassa's production services for his latest album, *Crown*, he lends his blues compositions a hip-hop braggadocio, underwritten by some of the most unearthly chops you'll hear. Seriously, the Hendrix and SRV comparisons are not just to put his playing into some kind of stylistic context.

We've seen him playing solo, improvising on the guitar for an audience of nerds at guitar shows in an atmosphere that might otherwise be artistically sterile, and yet he commands the room, alerting all in attendance that there are indeed new ways of expression yourself on guitar, in a style that's hardly new.

Gales is a southpaw and favours his signature gear; his Magneto S-style electric through a solid-state DV "Raw Dawg" EG signature head, with his MXR drive and Cry Baby in front. What he brings to the blues is simply himself, a player with a virtuosic touch and good sense to augment a piece with something off-menu – jazz, classical, whatever – to keep the audience at the edge of their seats.

Words by Anna Rose. Photos by Chuck Brueckmann.

# RETURN OF THE KINGS

As they wade through the waters of the new world around them, Alter Bridge have grown a new appreciation for their art, and developed new perspectives for how they should approach it. Mark Tremonti and Myles Kennedy tell Australian Guitar how their seventh album, Pawns & Kings, reflects the new age of Alter Bridge.

No strangers to scorching solos, industrious riffs and thematic intensity, Alter Bridge are back with their seventh album, *Pawns & Kings*. Across ten songs, the band welcome fans new and old alike to join them on the next chapter in their journey – which at this point, has spanned nearly two decades. Heralded by the singles 'Silver Tongue', 'Sin After Sin' and its title track, *Pawns & Kings* veers away from the themes of its two (largely politically driven) predecessors, *The Last Hero* (2016) and *Walk The Sky* (2019).

For album number seven, Alter Bridge have instead opted for a message a little more resolute. This resigned standpoint is delivered with a combination of techniques and gear that uphold the signature Alter Bridge character, while introducing new elements that demonstrate the band's continued evolution in songwriting and performance.

From their respective homes, guitarists Myles Kennedy and Mark Tremonti (who also just released a covers album, *Mark Tremonti Sings Frank Sinatra*, to raise funds for Down Syndrome charities) talk to *Australian Guitar* about the themes, gear and more that drive the hard rock heroes' latest offering.

## ON THE MESSAGE BEHIND PAWNS & KINGS...

With *The Last Hero* released around the time Donald Trump was elected as the 45th US President, it was difficult for Kennedy to say how (if at all) the unfolding of a new political landscape would shape the future of Alter Bridge. Though on the surface, *Pawns & Kings* may show the band in the same ballpark of disdain and incredulity they were on *The Last Hero*, there's more throwing of arms to the air with a sense of "whatever".

Ever a pensive man, Kennedy broaches the band's thematic evolution: "These are very tumultuous, strange times, and they're very polarised. And for me, I think what I've learned is that you're not going to change anybody's minds. Some bands are really good at that; they find their spot and preach their worries and that's great for them. For me, I don't feel comfortable in that realm, I like to keep the lyrics timeless."

Kennedy takes album cut 'Silver Tongue' as an example, noting how people have tried to attach "something" to it. He, however, observes it to be a "timeless tale" – one that's "been going on as long as there have been human beings". He says: "You have people that seduce, people that are good at manipulating other people, and it doesn't always lead to good things. That's a song that is relevant now and will probably be relevant a hundred years from now because that's just the way we're hardwired, unfortunately.

"Then you have a song like 'Pawns & Kings', which I feel is an empowering song. It's like the battle cry for the underdog. Though you may look at a circumstance and think it seems impossible to overcome it, that song is that ray of hope – at least, that's what I extract from it. After years and years of writing songs, I've learnt that if you can keep it ambiguous enough, it'll apply in different arenas. I feel like it ages better – the shelf life doesn't run out as quickly."

Alter Bridge have indeed written songs that fit that mould in the past, such as 'Wayward One' from 2007's *Blackbird*. It's far from a conscious reasoning, though, that Alter Bridge have no notions of being the best band in the world for pushing political opinion. Kennedy says humbly: "Speaking for myself, I think if there's any agenda, [it's to] remember to be good to one another. Humanity is very important to me. And that song, 'Wayward One', is definitely a song about empathy. It's supercharged with empathy.

"[Nowadays] there's so much divisiveness, so much tribalism and so much embolism, I don't want to add to the noise there." Kennedy pauses, drawing a weighted breath. "I don't know what's going on – as a human being, I just want there to be more bridges – no pun intended! I want there to be more conversation – everybody just needs to chill out and talk to one another and remember that we're all in this together. At the end of the day, we're all stardust, man. We all have the same blood."

To speak to Kennedy, perched on top of a stool, relaxed in an environment he controls, he comes across as being the kind of man who prefers being in his own head rather than having everyone else's conversations melting in there. "I like to learn things," he says reasonably. "I'm always up for learning from somebody and I do like stimulating conversations, it keeps you sharp. And I need all the help I can get there, trust me. Especially the older I get and the more I realise how important it is to try and silence all the noise.

"It's no secret at this point, especially after *Walk The Sky*. *Walk The Sky* was essentially, in a lot of ways, me really being open to talking about how into meditation I am and being present I am, and I feel like that has been such a saving grace in my life. Not to preach the gospel of meditation; I don't want to be that guy, but at the same time, I feel like it's helped me be a better artist, because by learning how to turn down the noise in my brain, I can centre in on the music."

## ON ALTERING THEIR SONGWRITING PROCESS...

Centre in on the music, Kennedy and Tremonti surely did. Though the pair have a certain aptitude in how they've demoed songs over the last 25 years or so, pandemic-driven lockdowns and not being able to be physically present with one another forced Kennedy, at least, to refine his song writing craft even more. "All I had to do was sit in my studio and work," he says. "I feel like I became, not a better songwriter, but better at documenting ideas and concepts. Just quicker. For me, that helped a lot with the process.

"[Album opener] 'This Is War', that came to me in kind of a dream state. And as I was waking up, I'd spent enough time after the pandemic in my studio getting pretty proficient with my stuff where it didn't take long to take what I was hearing in my head and track it.

"Program the drums quickly, play all the parts, and then move on without it being this laboured, 'Oh I've gotta get this right and this right and fine tune this,' so it's just very streamlined – in a lot of ways, that helped the creation of this record tremendously."

Kennedy's statement isn't to say that his approach to his contribution to *Pawns & Kings* was entirely different to Alter Bridge's prior six albums, rather, he sees it as more of a carry-over methodology that began with *Walk The Sky*. "The demos were more realised than they had been in the past," Kennedy recalls. "A lot of times Mark and I would kind of get in the same room and go 'Hey, do you have a part that goes with this part?'

"It's funny because people will go, 'Oh, go back to the old way you used to do it,' and well, it's really no different. We're refining the ideas a little bit more before we present them to our partner. So, if I hand over a track, I'm still leaving him a space there to put his stamp on it, it's the same concept."

Tremonti offers his take on working out balance between himself and Kennedy when lockdowns prevented them from working simultaneously. "I would break out my cell phone, get on Zoom with him," Tremonti says of a process that became the standard for so many other musicians. "I would turn in a few songs, he [Kennedy] would listen to them and give his input. I remember the first song he turned in was 'Silver Tongue' - he turned in two parts that went back and forth [between us].

"We like to keep our demo phase loose. We don't want to say, 'Here's this completely completed song,' because then it turns into somebody's solo project. So, when we can get together as a band, we can always have that alternate sound.

"When Scott and Brian [bassist Brian Marshall and drummer Scott Phillips] come to the mix, it gives it that backbone, that rhythm section that is so recognisable to us. When it's just me and Myles doing our demos, it sounds a little bit like me, it sounds a little bit like Myles. But when you get us all playing on it, it gets that AB characteristic."

## ON GUITARS, PEDALS AND MORE...

Kennedy is positively swimming in equipment in what he calls his "office studio environment". He sits with his arms folded looking from an angle at a monitor, the camera capturing his profile. None of the gear here, however, made it onto the new album. "I had grand delusions of trying to do a YouTube channel like when the pandemic hit," he explains with a bashful smile. "I bought all the stuff, and had it set up and I was like, 'Well I've gotta come up with content for that. I can set the camera, but I think I'd be a huge bore,' so I scrapped the plans!"

Thanks to a good hunk of other gear though, the sonic stamp in *Pawns & Kings* is distinctly Alter Bridge, with many of its riffs' nuances and the execution of solos echoing the band's earlier work nearly some 20 years ago. Album cut 'This Is War', for example, boasts a menacingly effervescent opening riff with a very distinct attack that continues into the chorus. Such a sound was established throughout the album by a relative newcomer to Kennedy's arsenal, the PRS McCarty Electric Guitar. "It has elements of a single coil sound that uses Narrowfield pickups," the frontman says of the instrument's make up. "It gets that top end that I really like with that character without all of the hum, and especially when using high gain like we're using, the last thing you want to do is plug a single coil into some of these amps, it's going to buzz like crazy.

"This guitar worked really well for that. It just has a certain cut – I used that guitar on about 80 per cent of the record. Then there's my tried and true [PRS SC] 245 that I've used since the *Blackbird* days [2007], I used that on the other tracks. I've used it forever, it's kind of been a signature guitar for a long time until this black [McCarty] one came along, it's like I love this guitar! It just has such a character to it."

At times, some of the album's guitar rhythms and melodies boast a wonderful push and pull, which are then interjected by wailing, desperate solos. This marriage of sound and technique is sometimes broken down in songs like 'Stay' (which sees Tremonti take on lead vocals) or can establish a particular swagger as in 'Holiday', before bringing back the aggressive drives as heard in 'Fable Of The Silent Son'. Because this audio landscape is so in keeping with the noise of Alter Bridge releases of yore, you may think the band have utilised many of the same pedals – not so.

Where FullTone was the preferred pedal for the effects on renowned Alter Bridge hits like 'Before Tomorrow Comes' and the solo on 'Blackbird', Kennedy has "started veering away" from the brand, his eye caught by something a little sexier – the J. Rockett Chicken Soup Overdrive.

"They're amazing," Kennedy gushes. "I'm afraid to say this because people are going to snag them up! They have a notch at the mid-range frequency that works perfectly for us. It's like corduroy, that's the sound I'm shooting for; it's not too saturated, it's still got this space, and that's what I like about using [these] pedals, you know. I'm not using Metal Zones, let's just put it that way!"

Choosing the right instrument is (as Kennedy attests, appreciative of the intentional pun) instrumental in establishing one's signature sound.

"I think that's part of the journey," he says. "I kind of look at it like my voice – it took me years and years to find this sound and it's the same thing, stylistically, the inflections: it's me. When I sing, you're gonna know 'That's that guy'. It's the same thing with guitar, and that's why I'm so grateful that PRS did this for me, it's like I was hearing this thing that didn't exist and I was like 'Wow how can we get this character?'

"Mark has utilised these guitars now for nearly two decades, probably over two decades, and you know it's part of his musical DNA – so you combine that sound with his touch and there's Mark. I think that's why I embarked on this as well."

## ON AMPS AND THAT ELUSIVE MT100...

Tremonti looks as if he's nested in a small warehouse, but really, it's his home studio, "the best room in the house", according to the Riff Lord. It's really no secret but Tremonti is, by all accounts, an amp-over-guitar man. "I have a signature guitar and I don't need to upgrade, you know, because I love my guitar," he says. "I've got the MT 15 right here," he points over his shoulder. He flips around his phone camera to proudly show off his collection of amps, moving away from his desk and taking the camera into what can only be described as a walk-in wardrobe for amplifiers. "There's the RK100," he says, pointing to a monster at the bottom of a shelf housing various heads. "Here are the best ones though," he adds, gesturing towards a Dumble and a Trainwreck. "Those are the best other than, of course, the MT 15. Yeah, that's my obsession: all these amps."

Rumours about and images of the MT100 have graced online forums and interviews with Tremonti for around four years now. Amp aficionados and/or followers of Tremonti's dedication to the box beasts will already know, with the PRS Mark Tremonti Signature MT 15 being the colossus that it is, that the MT100 should knock down walls – and Tremonti has one right behind him.

It's a wooden prototype and not the actual thing; Tremonti's not permitted to share photos of it yet. Nevertheless, the MT 100 was the main focus on *Pawns & Kings*. "I've got two prototypes here," Tremonti says. "The first prototype was a two channel but now it's a three channel. That was one of the first versions of the three channel," he finishes, indicating the wooden box again. "I just sent the newest prototype back to the factory two days ago, and I should get it back tomorrow. And fingers crossed, after almost four years, I'll be able to greenlight the head.

"I've also been opening up all my cabinets at home and mix matching speakers and trying to come up with the best [configuration]. 'What are we using? What speakers are we using? What dimensions are we using? What grill are we using?' I finally came up with a pattern of speakers in the cabinet that sounds perfect for the head, and to me it's going to be the greatest, greatest tone I've ever had."

In collaboration with PRS' Rich Hannon and Doug Sewell, Tremonti was instrumental in developing his new obsession. "Round and round and round just to get it right," he says of the meticulous process in the amp's creation. "Because, you know, once you think you're at a finish line with something, all of a sudden, a war breaks out, and you can't get the tubes. So, we had to change tubes. And we had to make that work. We had to, like I said, go from a two channel to a three channel and they had to find a whole new chassis.

"It's made us come through a lot of changes, but it's going to end up being, for me, the perfect amplifier. And I'm glad, I don't ever want to just put something out because it's easy. You know, I want to put it out because it's absolutely right, and it's taken a lot of years to get it that way."

## ON RECREATING THEIR IN-HOUSE SOUND ON THE LIVE STAGE...

Alter Bridge hit the road once more earlier in November when they commenced a tour through Europe and North America that will take them well into 2023. No matter where you're positioned in any kind of venue – front back, stalls, balcony etc. – the high-end quality of sound with which Alter Bridge perform never wavers. That being said, there's much to account for when trying to balance the distinct preferences and styles of both guitarists' gear and technique.

"There has to be a good balance between me and Myles, our amps have to fill different frequency ranges," Tremonti begins. "When I was younger, I used to like that scooped kind of low end and high-end heavy metal kind of sound, but that stuff doesn't cut through a mix well. So, I added way more mid-range to my tone. So, it really punches through the mix, and it doesn't really live with the bass guitar when it comes to the frequencies, [so it] can get muddied up there.

"Our sound engineer is brilliant at taking everything we do and putting it in its own space, you know, so nobody shares the same frequencies. Myles is here, and I'm there, and it all works."

Kennedy's preference for amps still lies with his trusted Diezel VH4 100w Guitar Amp Head and his Herbert 180W Tube Guitar Head. "They fit really well in this context," he says of using them for *Pawns & Kings*. Were he and Tremonti both to utilise Diezels on the live stage, they'd end up filling the same frequencies, as Tremonti explains.

"I used to be a huge believer in having two amps at the same time for your tone," he says, "because those two amps are going to do two different things and fill that bigger space. But I'm finally down to one amp live and it's just going to be the MT 100. That's because I have a three-channel amp. It's such a versatile amp, I don't need anything else.

"It's got the best clean channel I've ever heard on a 100 watt head," he continues, "and it's got a great overdrive channel that serves a good gap between your dead clean and your heavy lead sound. That amp will go from as clean as you can get to a really sweet overdrive, like a Dumble kind of boutique sound, to a heavy metal sound, you know? So, it's got everything, everything that you could ever, *I* could ever need live."

"It's a noise machine up there!" Kennedy cries. "120 decibels of pure sonic fury up there!" A stark contrast to the in-studio setting, then.

## ON HOW TO PLAY SONGS FROM PAWNS & KINGS...

When you give it a listen, it may seem that there's a certain complexity of character to *Pawns & Kings*. Tremonti, however, says there are both technically demanding aspects to playing some of the new material, and some relatively simple areas, too. On the album's title track, Tremonti elaborates, "There's not a lot of effects on there. I leave my gain at about noon and just kind of use a lot of palm muting for some of the heavier, faster riffs.

"Like, if I was to learn that song from scratch, I would probably start with the hardest part and go straight to the bridge and learn the bridge breakdown riff, the heavy riffs, because that's the toughest part to learn." Tremonti's advice? "Go backwards from there."

Tremonti got tripped up in the early stages of putting down the track, though. "Scott and Myles were playing the intro with this weird feel," he recalls. "Me and Elvis [producer Michael "Elvis" Baskette] are like, 'What are you doing? This is so weird', like, it's this weird time thing. And me and Elvis were like, 'I don't get it', but Scott and Myles are like, 'No, this is great, we're gonna do this.' So, the beginning of that song, I would leave that for last and then learn the rest of it.

> "THERE HAS TO BE A GOOD BALANCE BETWEEN ME AND MYLES, OUR AMPS HAVE TO FILL DIFFERENT FREQUENCY RANGES"
>
> **MARK TREMONTI**

"Learn the bridge first," Tremonti's lesson continues. "You know, the chorus is very simple and straightforward." Tremonti moves onto unpacking the more technically challenging and "weird" ideas of 'Pawns & Kings', revealing they can trip up even a well-seasoned musician like Tremonti. "I would compartmentalise every bit of that song," he advises, "because I remember how difficult it was for me to memorise the song as a whole in one day and be able to... because when we do pre-production, you could spend a month on a song but then you put it away for three months, so you have to relearn it and play it in one day.

"And that song was a challenge. For your brain to have to take that information in so quickly and be able to play it from start to finish in one day, it was tough. There's a lot going on there."

As for other cuts of the album suitable for some stellar Alter Bridge imitation action, Tremonti recommends single 'Silver Tongue'. "I think the driving force of it is the main opening riff that, um," Tremonti vocalises a few chugga-chugga-chuggas, "That's how that song was born.

"When you write a song, there's usually that key part where you're like, 'Alright, I'm gonna build a whole song around this part,' because that was the special part that I think built that song."

## HOW THE ALBUM STANDS UP IN THE ALTER BRIDGE DISCOGRAPHY...

"I'm such a funny bird there because I don't truly know until about a decade later," Kennedy says of how he thinks *Pawns & Kings* will stand up in the band's twenty years of music-making history. "You're talking to the one guy who very rarely listens to a record once he's [been] a part of making it. I'm always just kind of moving onto the next thing.

"Part of the problem also is I'm hypercritical; I'll pick things apart and get lost in my head, and that's something I'm trying to work on so maybe I'll be more comfortable listening to records as I continue to evolve as a human being and become more conscious. I think for whatever reason, it's a real challenge.

"But with all of that nonsense aside, I will say that we've achieved what we set out to do when we made this record, which was have it be a little bit more refined, not as dense from a sonic standpoint, not as many layers, though there's still layering here and there – on 'Fable Son' there's some sonic landscaping – but overall, we tried to keep this more focused, and Elvis was on board with this as well, but Mark and I, we were like: this is what we want to shoot for here.

Kennedy ponders, "People keep comparing it to *Fortress*, which is interesting for me because I don't know if that's going to be a shared assessment. Who knows." It's an assessment Kennedy admits he would be more than happy with. "From what I remember [of it], that probably would be on top of my list as one of my favourite AB records," he says, "especially its title track; it shapes the whole thing and pulls it altogether."

That old delivery choice, you might argue, should have been considered for the title track on *Pawns & Kings*, which serves as the album's closing track. "Part of the reason we did that is because we thought, "Well if it's gonna be the closing track, because we called the record *Pawns & Kings*, we figured it might be a nice way to punctuate the record, and there's something about the way that song ends where it's very final."

You might say it's the checkmate. Realising he's set himself up for one final yet appropriate pun, Kennedy smiles, "Yes! There you have it."

CLASSIC TRACK

# AC/DC

## HELLS BELLS

Learn the hot riffs and blistering lead work on this iconic album opener from AC/DC's 1980 comeback release, *Back In Black*

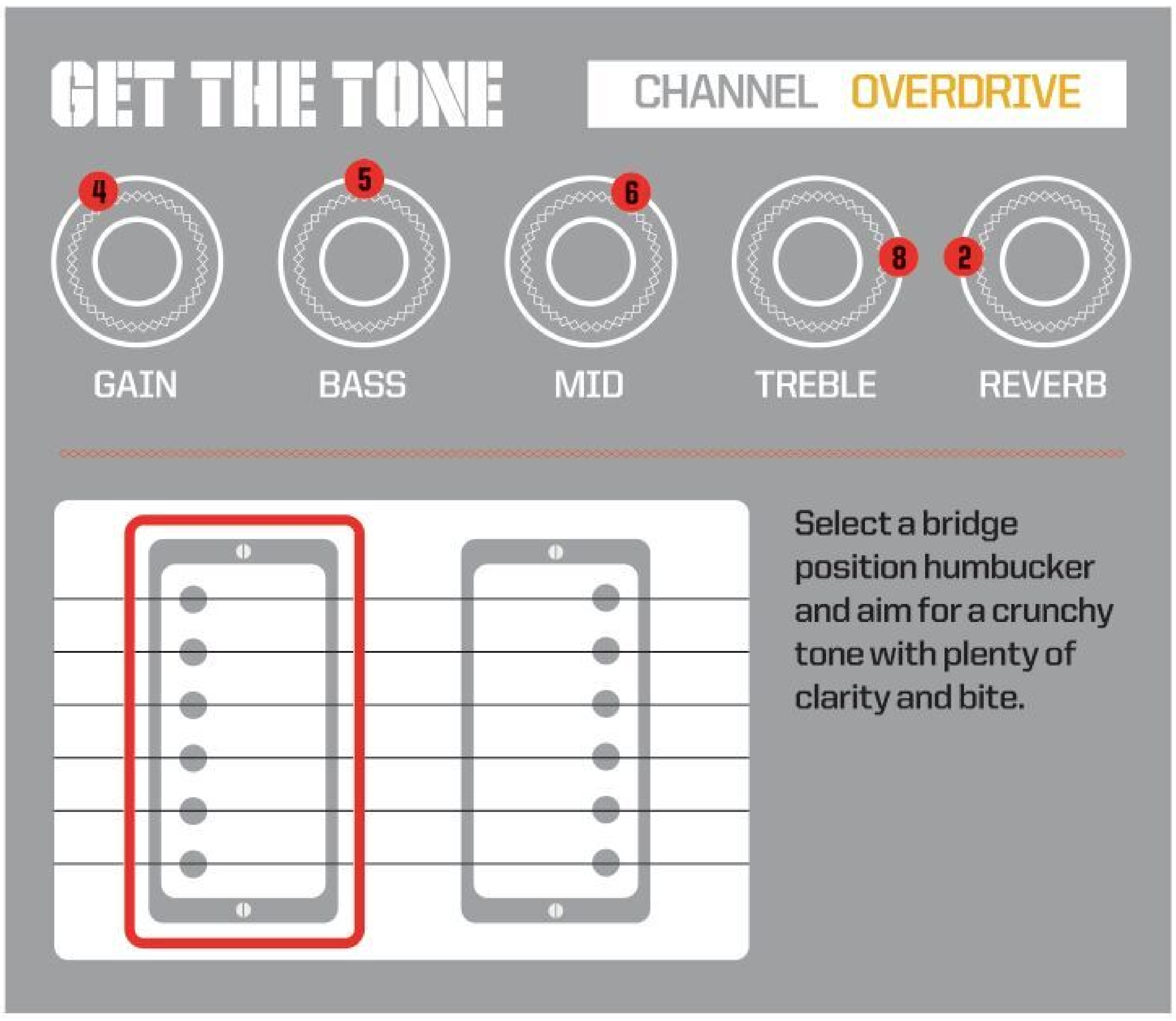
Photo Getty Guitars and backing Simon Young

This month we're looking at AC/DC's iconic *Back In Black* album opener and staple in the band's live show still today, *Hells Bells*. This is AC/DC at their rocking best, and, with trademark driving rock riffs, easy powerchords and some incendiary minor pentatonic licks, *Hells Bells* has something for every guitarist.

The main riff is an arpeggio that outlines an Am11 chord – and, though not too technically demanding, it can be tricky to get the feel. Practise slowly while making sure to always target the right string. Beware of the tempo in the intro, though. It shifts from a stately 96 bpm to a mid-tempo 108 bpm by the time the whole band comes in, so make sure to match your timing with the gradual push of the track.

# SOUND ADVICE

## Everything you need to know before playing 'Hell's Bells'

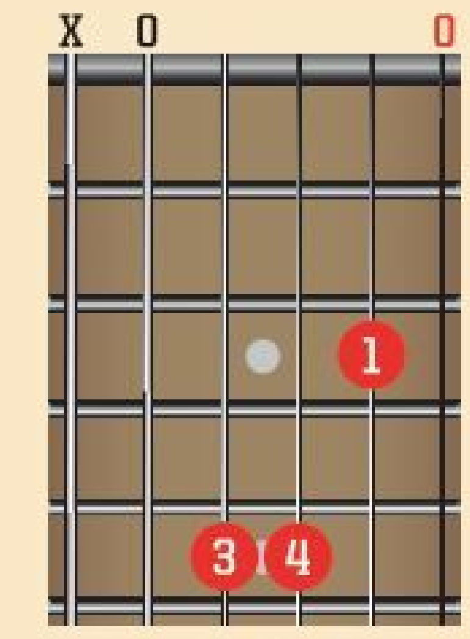


Select a bridge position humbucker and aim for a crunchy tone with plenty of clarity and bite.

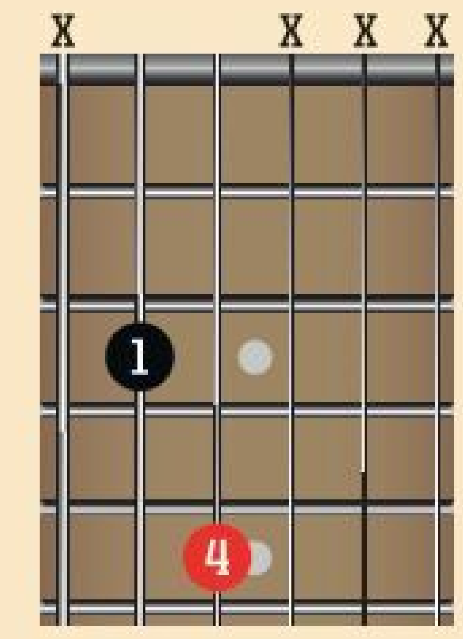
Angus and Malcolm Young's bone-crunching overdrive and masterful delivery are a great lesson in the notion that less is more. A Marshall style amp is a core ingredient, as is the combination of Gretsch G6131 and Gibson SG guitars with bridge pickups selected. In terms of tone, the approach here was to just plug straight into the amp and turn the volume up loud. Simple. Assuming your neighbours don't share your interest in the sound of cranked Marshall stacks, wind down the volume, keep the preamp gain low (modern amps have more drive) and use a Tube Screamer style overdrive pedal for a mid boost on the lead parts. If you are in a position to crank a valve amp up loud, keep the drive low and aim for a loud, crunchy clean tone for the rhythm parts. Too much gain and fizz and that direct and powerful sound will be lost.

## CHORDS

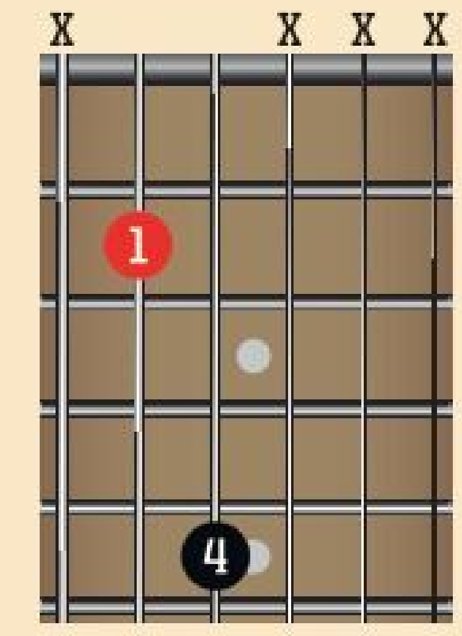
*Hells Bells* has five main chords to learn (A5, D5, C5, G5 and E5), plus a few variations. It's worth noting the G5 has no 3rd interval on the fifth string, thus turning it into a rockier sounding powerchord. We've included a fingering for an Am11. This chord isn't featured in the track per se, but it outlines the sound of the main riff and it could come in handy should you wish to strum out an acoustic version. The G/B is a classic way to transition between C5 and A5 thanks to the low notes in the chords which spell out a descending C-B-A bass melody.



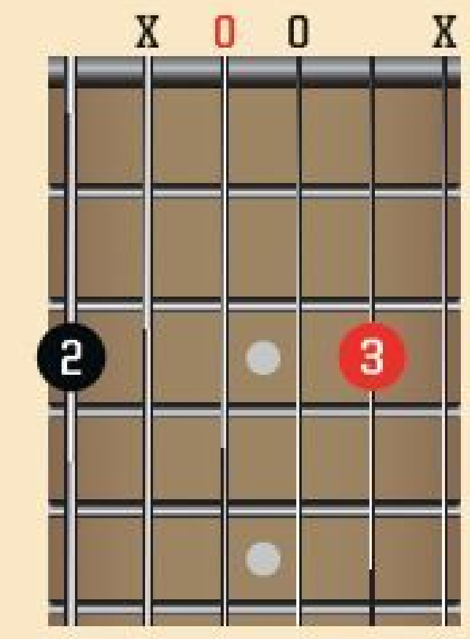
Am11



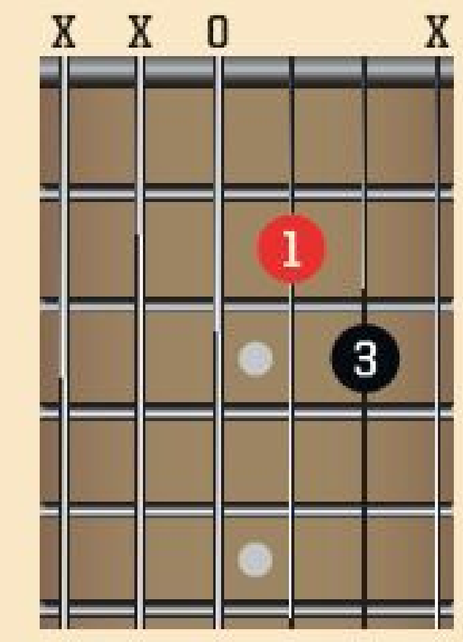
C5



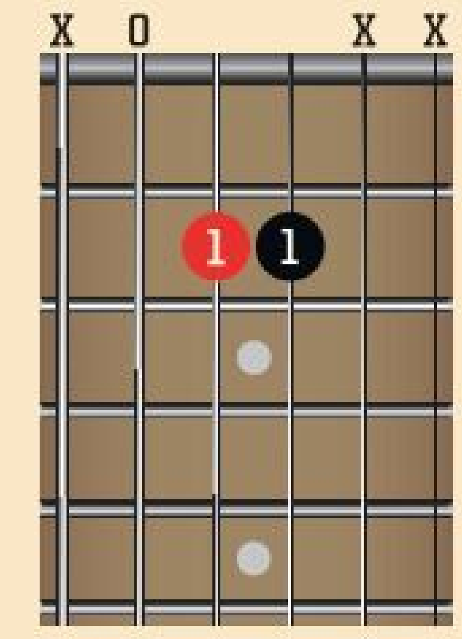
G/B



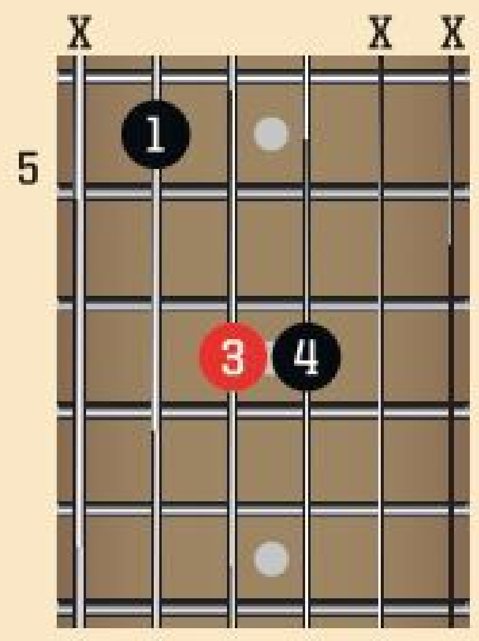
G5



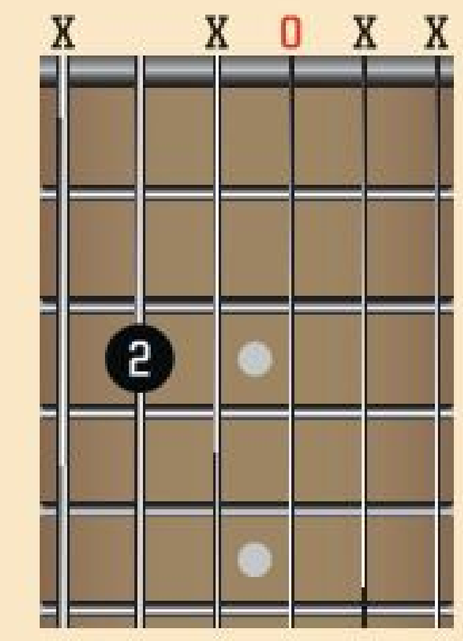
D5



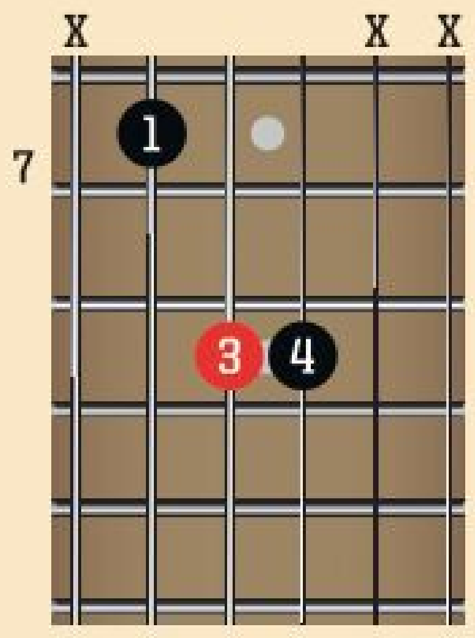
A5



D5



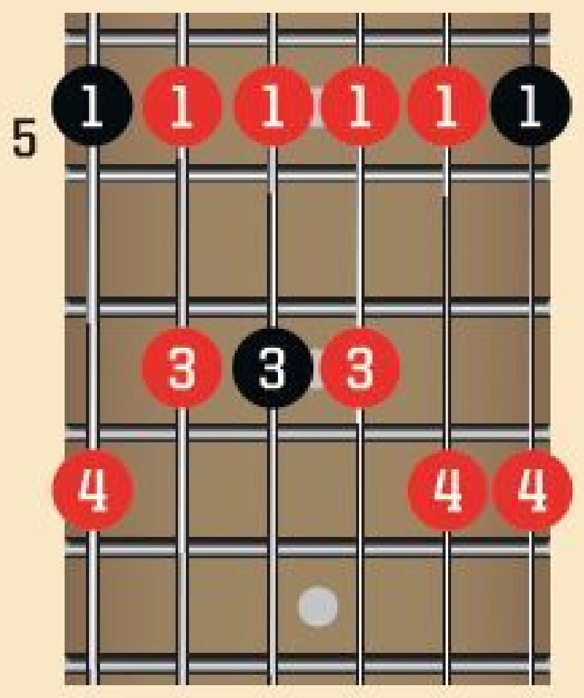
C5



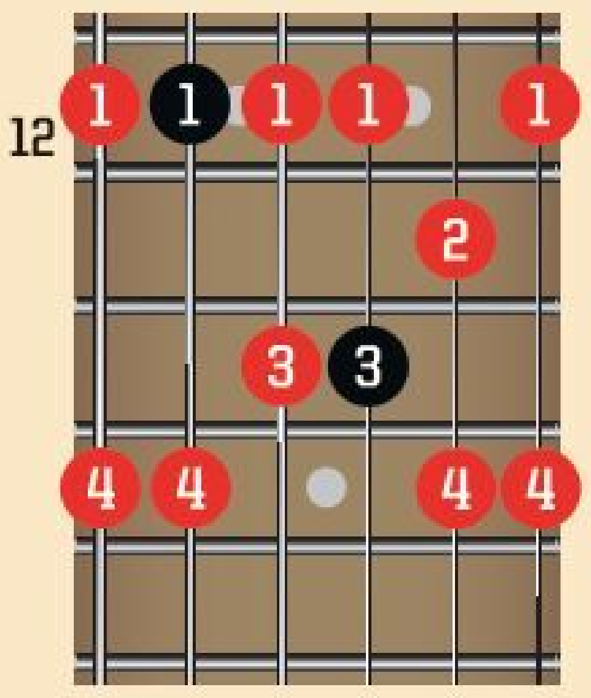
E5

## SCALES

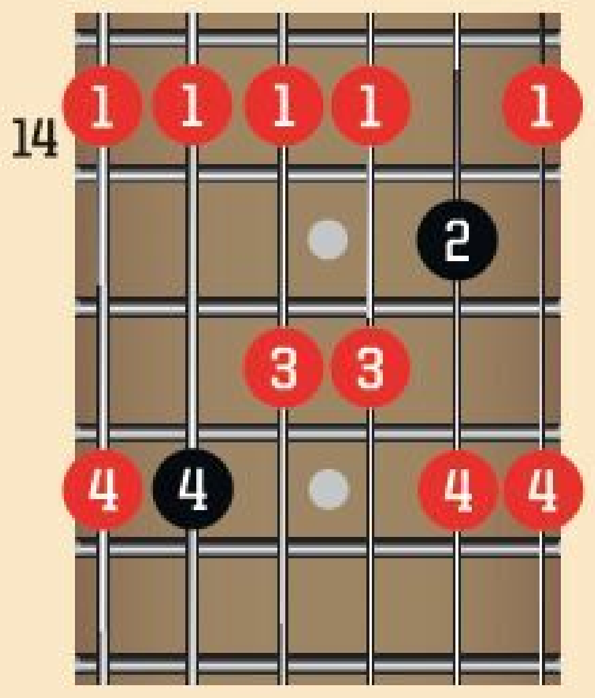
The guitar solos feature many of Angus's trademarks such as fast runs, doublestops and fierce finger vibrato. Most of the lead lines are based around the trusty A minor pentatonic scale, either at the 5th fret, mirrored up the octave on the 17th fret, and also in a slightly different shape at the 12th fret. We've also included a fingering for the D major pentatonic scale, which Angus uses briefly to add colour and contrast during the change to the D5 chord in the solo.



A minor pentatonic scale



A minor pentatonic scale



D major pentatonic scale

CLASSIC TRACK

# AC/DC HELLS BELLS

FULL TAB

**HELLS BELLS**
Music & Lyrics by Malcolm Mitchell Young,
Angus Mckinnon Young, Brian Johnson
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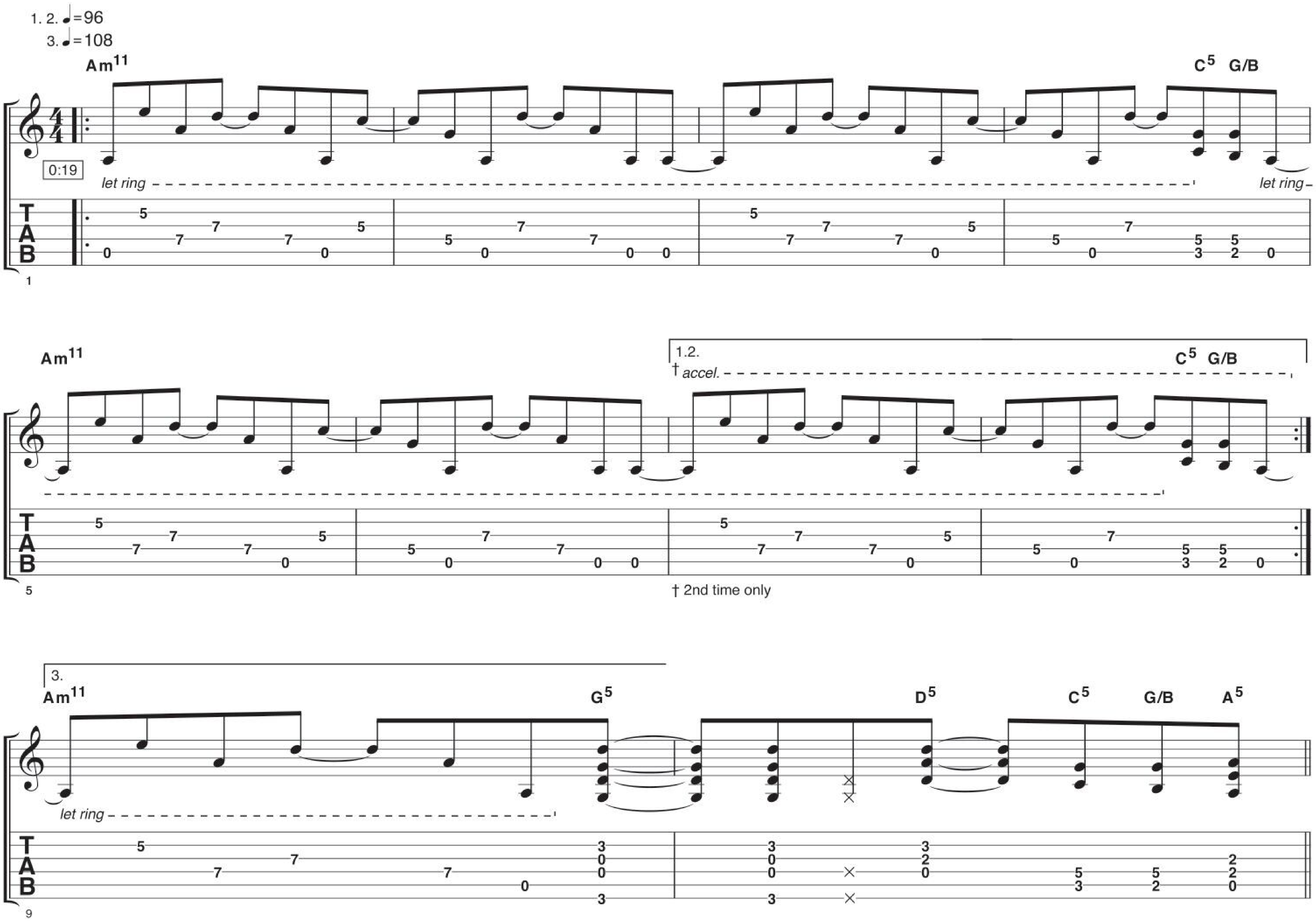
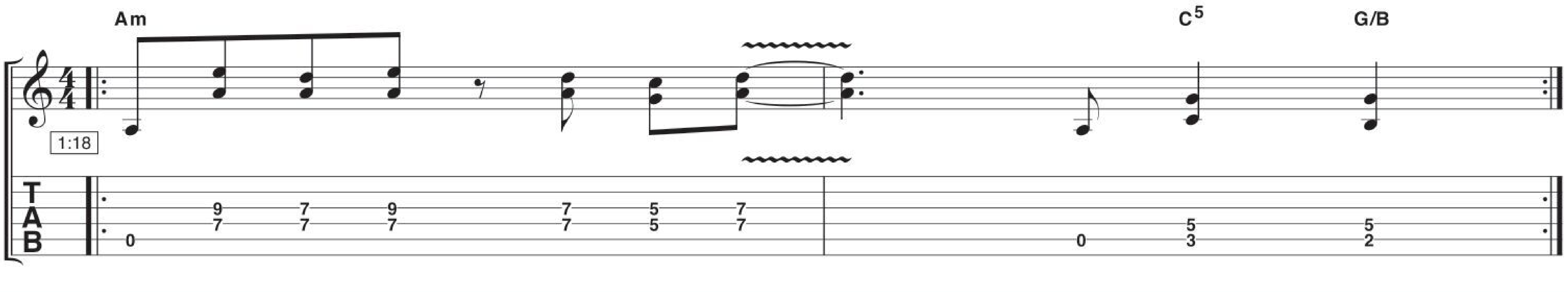
## AC/DC HELLS BELLS Main riff



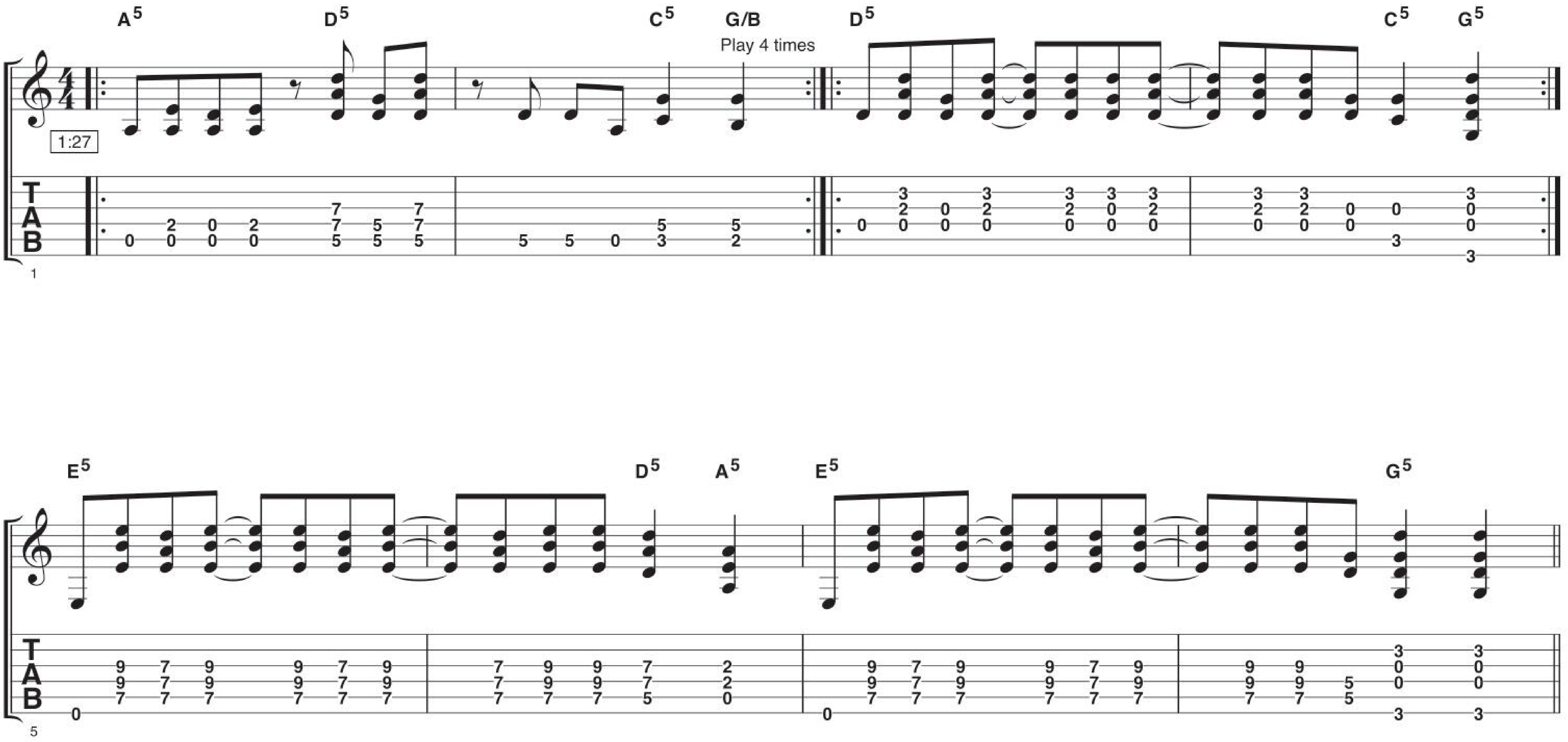
This riff features Angus' iconic arpeggio. It's tricky to play with a consistent feel so practise slowly to get the transitions dialled in. The tempo speeds up gradually so keep an ear on the backing as you play along. Listen out for Malcolm Young's supporting part which accentuates ringing A5 powerchords and the C5-G/B-A run at the end.

## AC/DC HELLS BELLS Pre-verse



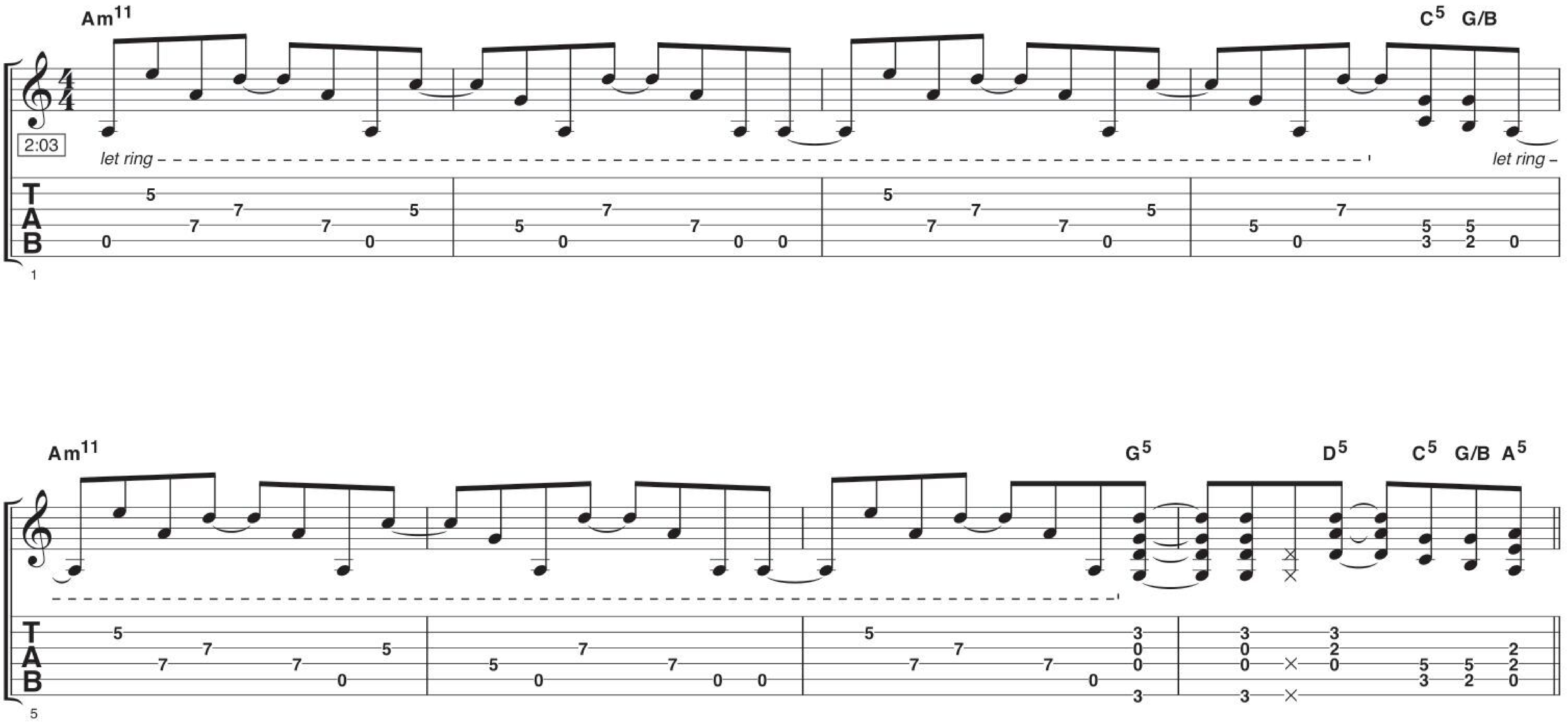
This section sets the scene for the verse with a classic bit of hard rock riffing. The finger vibrato on the last doublestop of bar 1 brings the part to life so be sure to include that. The C5 to G/B sounds great and only requires one note to be shifted. Play the C5 with your first and fourth fingers to make the change to G/B easier.

## **AC/DC** HELLS BELLS **Verse**


A5
D5
C5
G/B
Play 4 times
D5
C5
G5
1:27
E5
D5
A5
E5
G5

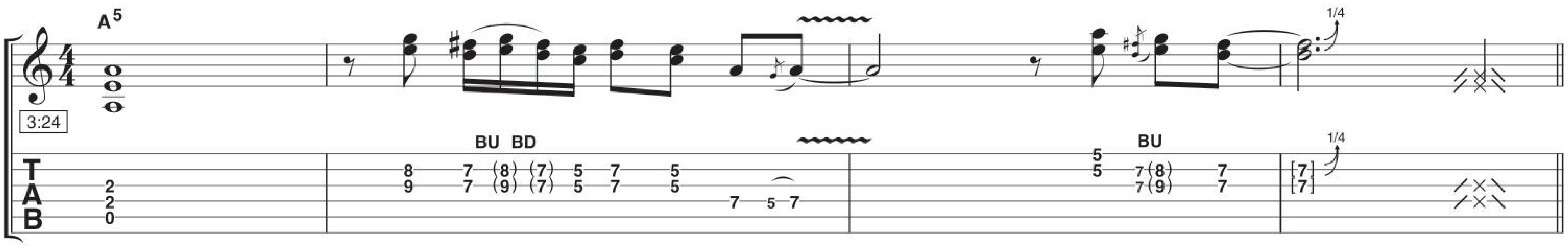
The verse section shifts tonal centre from A in bar 1 to D (bar 3) and then to E (bar 5). It creates a sense of movement and the E chords in the final bars help pull the music back to A in the next section. Make sure to keep the idle strings silent for clean, defined powerchords throughout.

## **AC/DC** HELLS BELLS **Chorus**


Am11
C5
G/B
2:03
let ring
let ring
Am11
G5
D5
C5
G/B
A5

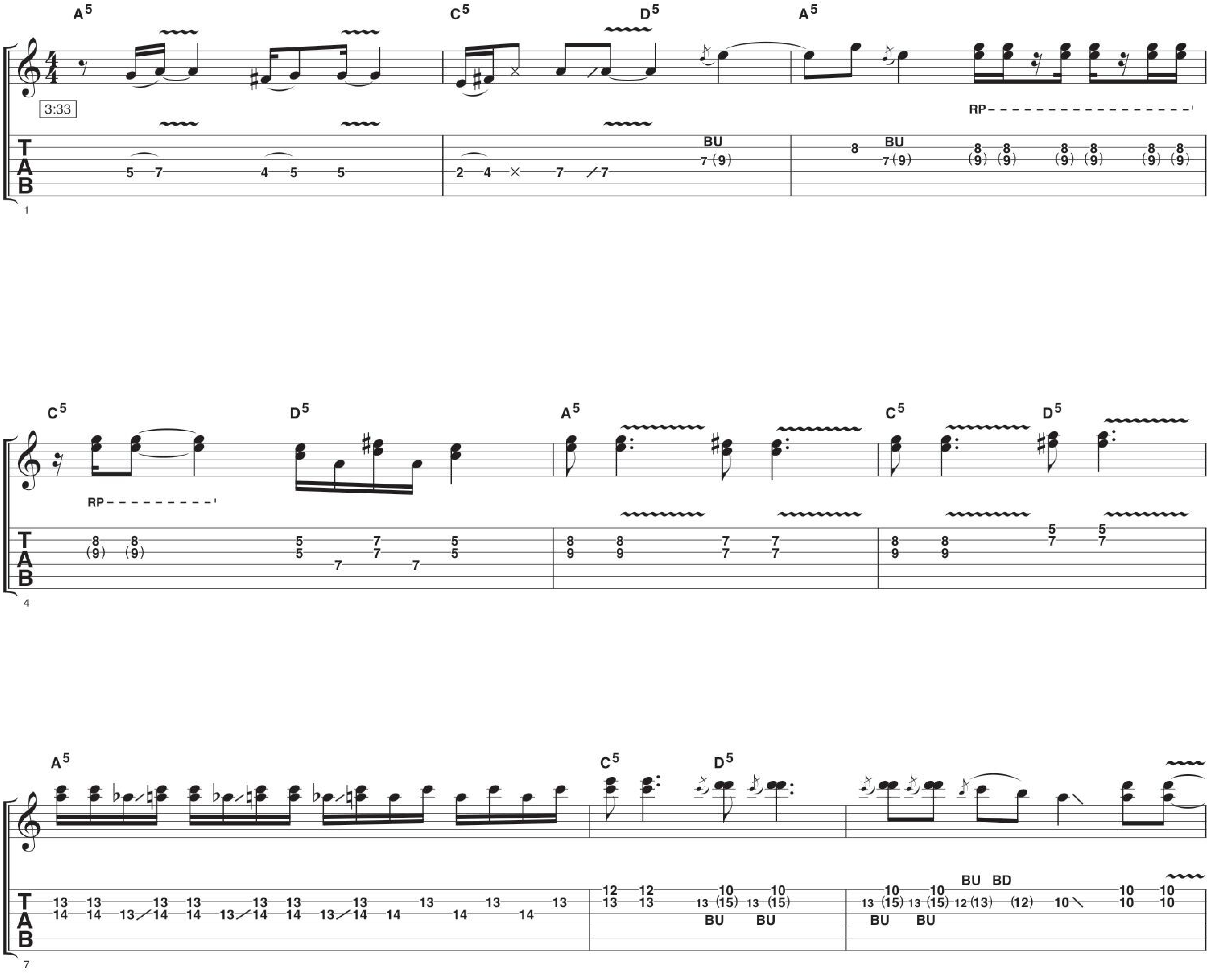
The chorus section follows an abridged version of the main riff. Both Angus and Malcolm would play the arpeggio in full here. It's well worth recruiting another player to experience the full force of two guitars if you can.

**AC/DC** HELLS BELLS **Pre-solo**

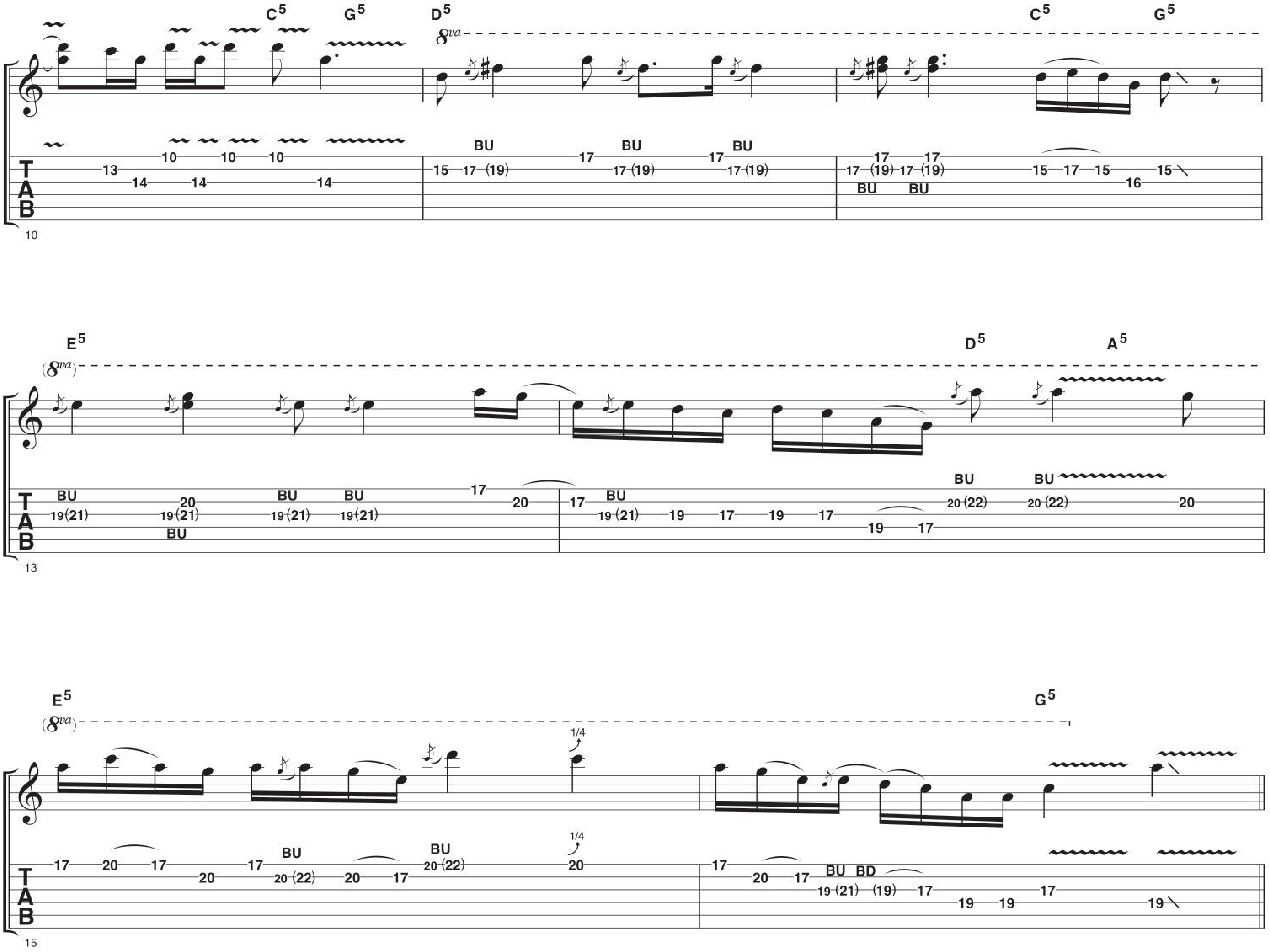

A5
3:24
1/4
BU BD
BU
1/4
T
A
B

The pre-solo features some tasteful bluesy doublestop licks. These will sound most authentic if played with the fingers – just keep hold of your pick between thumb and first finger, then pluck with your second and third fingers. Start this section with your guitar volume lowered slightly, then raise it to full on the final notes.

**AC/DC** HELLS BELLS **Guitar solo 1**

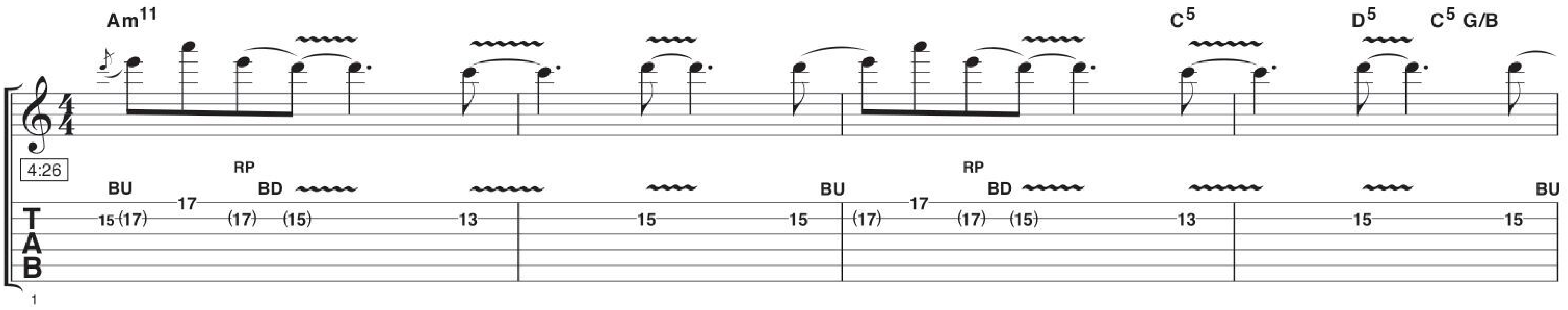

A5
C5
D5
A5
3:33
RP
BU
BU
1
C5
D5
A5
C5
D5
RP
4
A5
C5
D5
BU BD
BU BU
BU BU
7

### **AC/DC** HELLS BELLS Guitar solo 1 (cont'd)

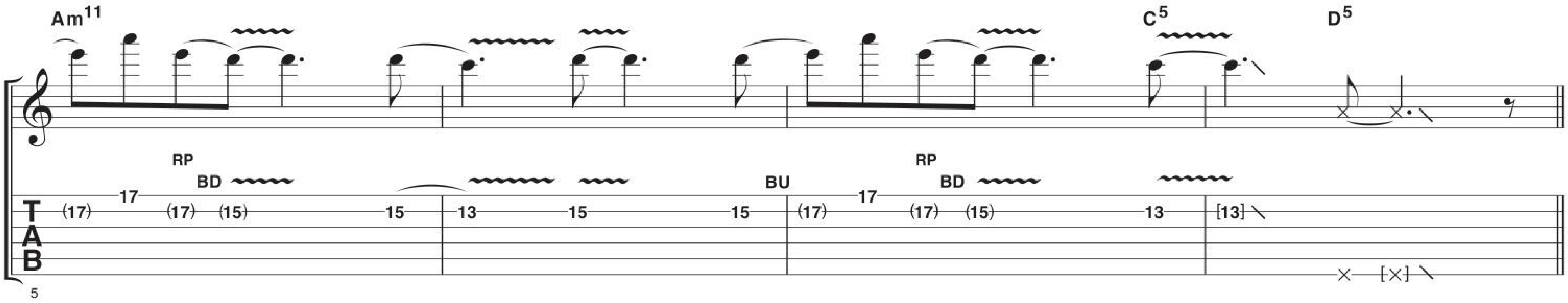

C5
G5
D5
8va
C5
G5
E5
D5
A5
E5
G5
1/4
BU
BD

The vibe here is frenetic, with moments of improvisation and an emphasis on overall feel rather than clinical precision. Pay attention to which fingers you use to fret the doublestops. Get it right and each lick will fall under your fingers more easily. Listen out for Angus' trademark vibrato and aim to mimic both the speed and pitch range.

### **AC/DC** HELLS BELLS Guitar solo 2

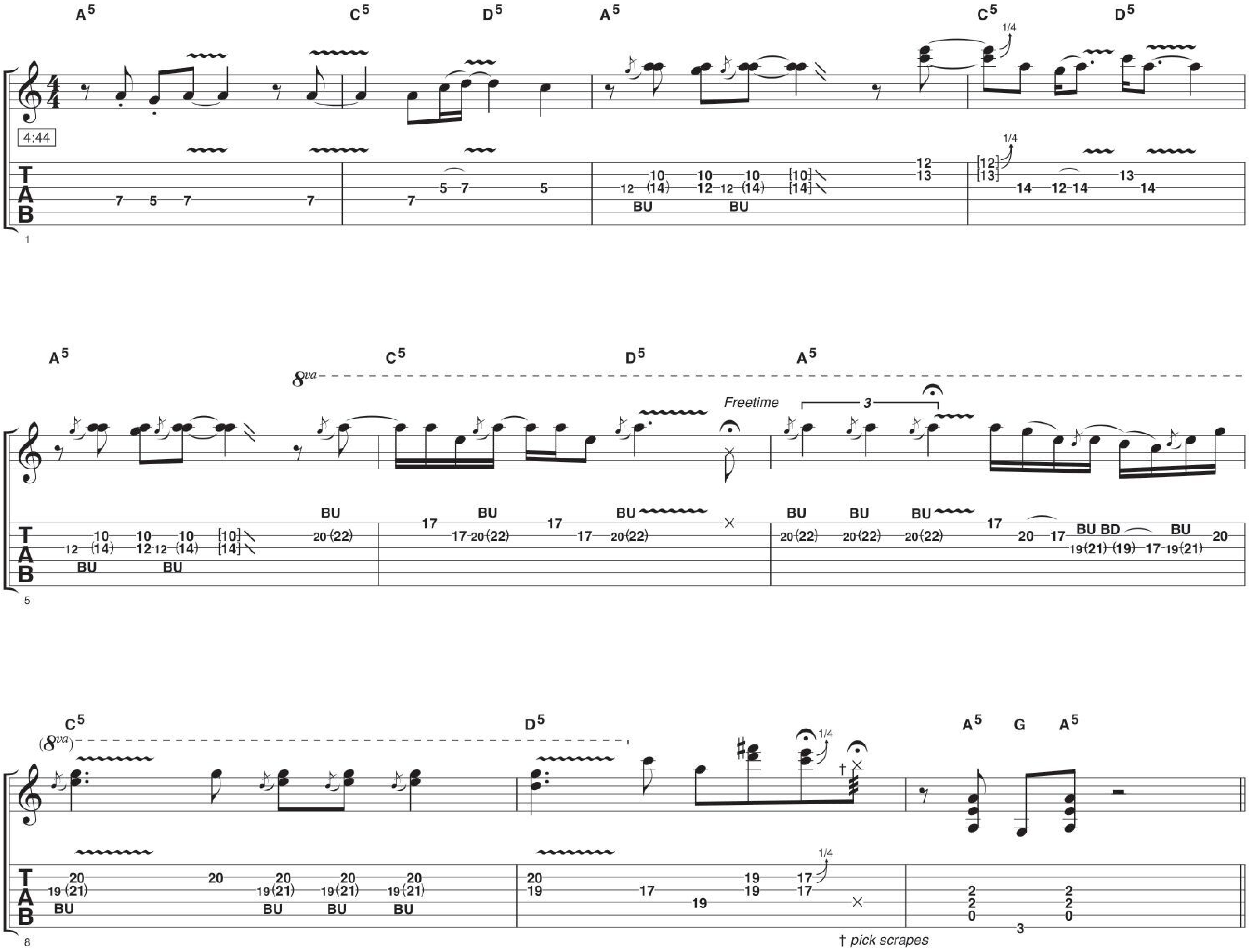

Am11
C5
D5
C5 G/B
4:26
BU
RP
BD

**AC/DC** HELLS BELLS Guitar solo 2 (cont'd)


Am11
C5
D5
RP
BD
BU
T
A
B
5

The second solo opens with a melody line played over the chorus, emphasising the top notes of the riff. The main thing to practise is bending the D note on the second string up a tone to E and back down.

**AC/DC** HELLS BELLS Outro solo


A5
C5
D5
4:44
1/4
BU
BD
8va
Freetime
3
G
† pick scrapes
T
A
B
1
5
8

This section features more trademark soloing up at the dusty end of Angus' SG. At the end the rhythm section breaks down into free time and we've noted these pauses (shown with fermata symbols: U). It may take a few practice runs to get the licks to fit. This type of ending would have been recorded live so it's all down to feel.

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FUTURE

# THE NEW WAVE

## THE HUMBLE P-90 GETS AN ACTIVE MAKEOVER THANKS TO FISHMAN AND GREG KOCH. DAVE BURRLUCK GOES IN SEARCH OF THE GRISTLE-TONE...

**Pretty much every pickup maker produces its own version of the legendary Gibson P-90 single coil. For a pickup that has been in production since 1946, there are now zillions of different flavours to choose from. Some like their P-90s hotter, great for rockier-intended Juniors and Specials, not least at the bridge. Others might want something with a cleaner voice, like you might hear from a Gibson archtop or thinline in neck position: the sound of jazz in the late 50s. Then there's the jangly P-90. On it goes...**

Pickup makers all have their own spin. They'll create different versions, cool, warm, hot and hotter. Some offer tapped outputs for cool and hot from one pickup, and others cram two coils – side by side or stacked on top of each other for humbucking performance – into the same soapbar or dog-ear cover. The choice from the man-in-the-shed part-timer to the big mainstream winders is unfathomably vast, especially when you add in non-adjustable staple or magnetic rod polepiece options.

What fewer do – with the exception of those humbucking types – is consider the potential hum pick up of the original P-90 single coil. There's a pretty good reason why the original humbucker was invented! Invariably louder than a Fender single coil, not only do you get more output but you can get more hum, too.

### The Fix

It's taken a while, but last year Fishman announced its Fluence Greg Koch Gristle-Tone P90 [pic 1], a fully hum-cancelling active design, with – importantly – three voices per pickup. With a suggested selling price of $719 per set they're not a cheap date, though they are totally unique, but you will see them at a lower cost from large retailers such as Andertons. They're available with both cream and black covers, too, with the usual slot-head height adjustable steel poles (wider spaced on the bridge unit at just under 52mm; the neck poles are closer to 48mm from centre-to-centre). And apart from the wavy line and small Fishman logo, they look like any other soapbar P-90 from a few feet away. But they're really not...

> **"Fishman's Fluence Greg Koch Gristle-Tone P90 is a fully hum-cancelling active design"**

Aside from their totally encapsulated solid-core 'coil' construction, paired here with Alnico V magnets, the Fluence P90 set offers three different voices per pickup. So the bridge goes for Voice 1: "Vintage P-90 with a healthy dose of honk"; Voice 2: "Highly revered muscular tone of a custom overwound P-90"; and Voice 3: "Bright jangly traditional single coil tone." The neck pickup offers Voice 1: "Underwound, aged P-90 clarity at ideal volume level"; Voice 2: "Fat, overwound tone without losing clarity and presence"; and Voice 3: "Clear, open vintage single coil tone."

Each pickup base [pic 2] has a three- and four-pin 'male' connector that connects with the 'female' hook-up leads, which simply push on. The rest of the wiring uses old-fashioned solder connections.

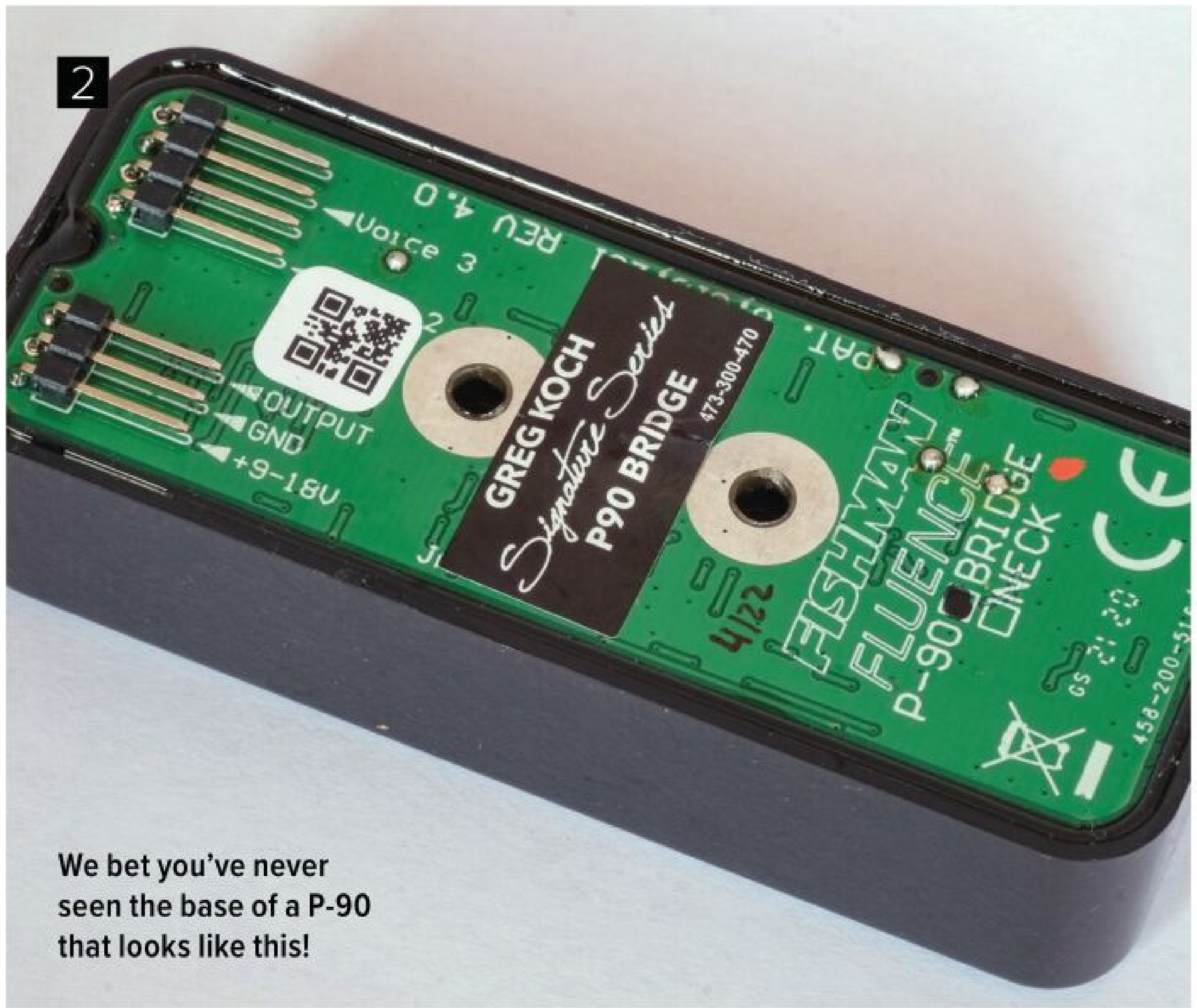
### Who's The Host?

I went for a Korean-made PRS SE Custom Semi Hollow Soapbar, which I last featured in The Mod Squad back in issue 472 when I was discussing dropping down to 0.008-gauge strings. It's a cool little guitar and as this pickup swap is all completely reversible, if I don't like the Gristle-Tone then I can simply swap back. It's lightweight, with a mahogany neck and body (chambered on the bass side), and a thin maple top faced with a lightly figured maple veneer. The PRS wrapover bridge nods to the Junior or Special's wrapover, but the scale length is longer at 635mm (25 inches).

Fishman's wiring diagrams are very clear, but with the two-control real estate of the intended host guitar, I can only simultaneously switch both pickups from Voice 1 to Voice 3 and Voice 2 using, for example, the supplied pull-switches on the volume and tone respectively. Obviously, to maximise the full potential of these three-voice pickups you'd need a four-control guitar such as a Les Paul Special (and two extra pull-push pots), but at least here I can listen to each sound. Particularly for a guitar you may plan

1

The Fluence P90s come in cream or, as here, black covers

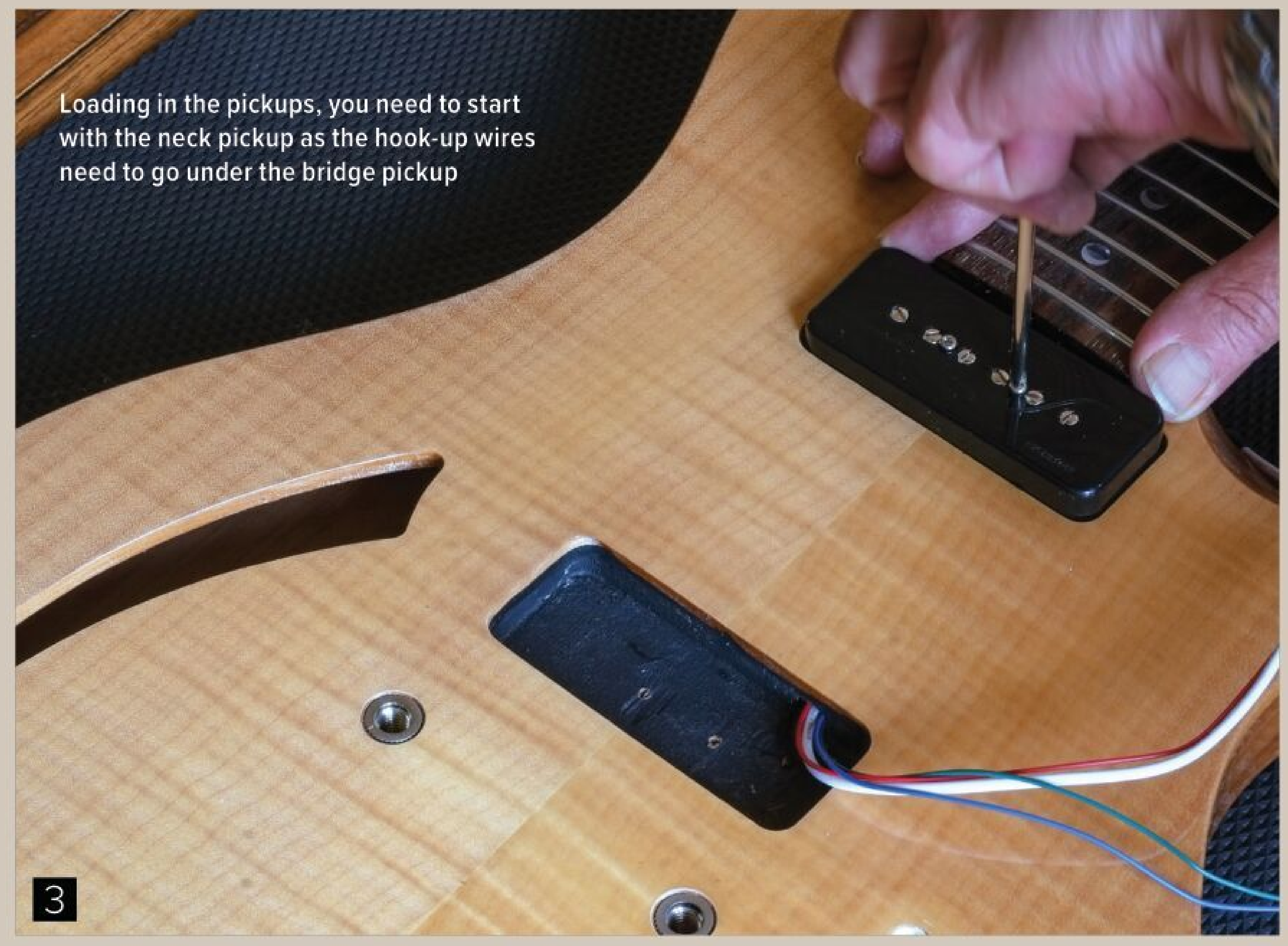


2

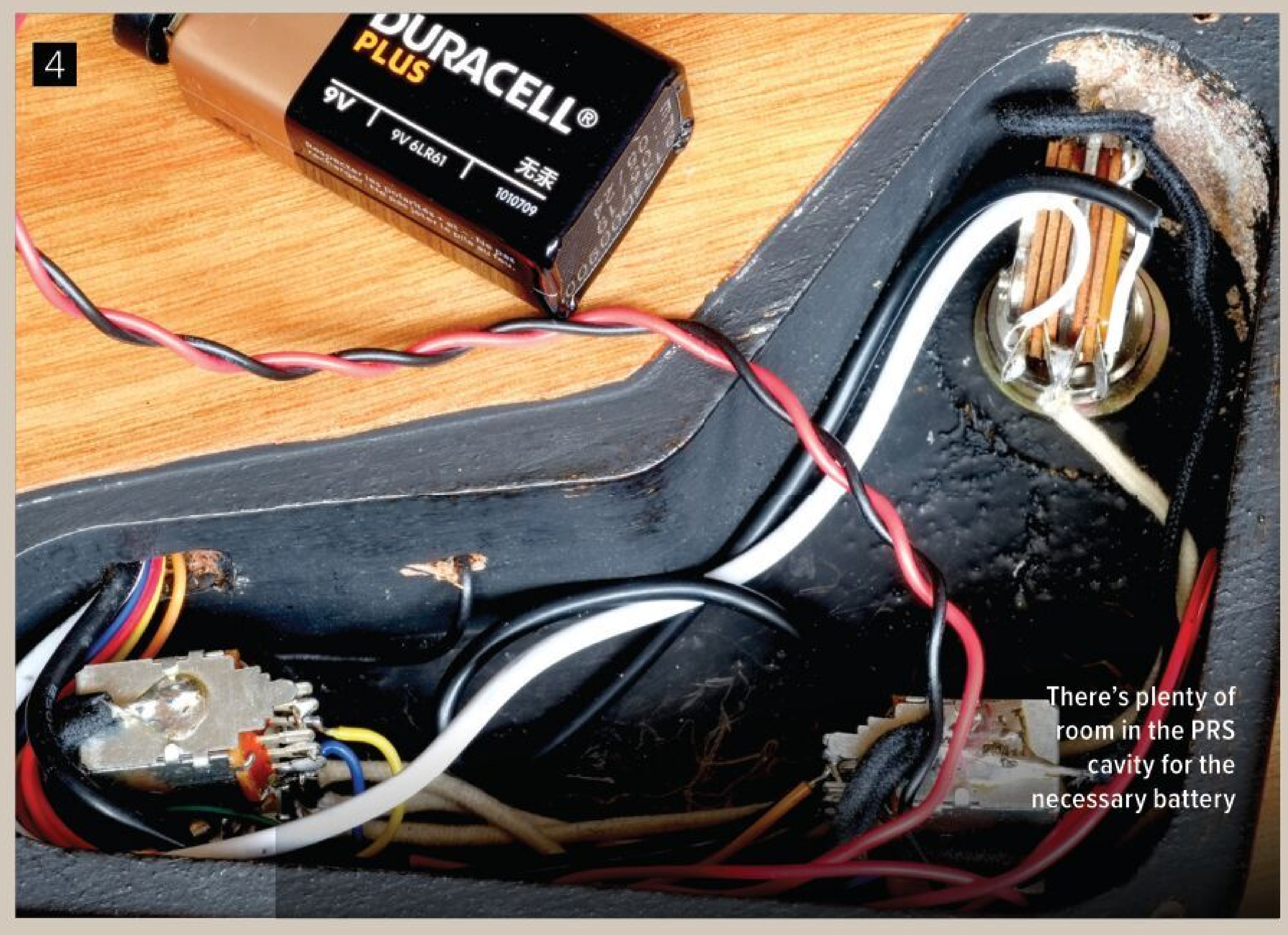
We bet you've never seen the base of a P-90 that looks like this!

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

Dave modded the PRS SE Custom Semi Hollow Soapbar with the Fishman Fluence Greg Koch Gristle-Tone P90. And it's a classy makeover


Loading in the pickups, you need to start with the neck pickup as the hook-up wires need to go under the bridge pickup

3


4

There's plenty of room in the PRS cavity for the necessary battery

These SE locking tuners are pretty classy but affordable

5

6

They're also a direct drop-in fit so there's no need to fill and redrill screw holes

The locking bolts need to be tight, but don't over do it

7

## THE SIZE OF IT

The new Fishman set are soapbars only, so a word of caution: not all soapbar P-90s are exactly the same size. As they usually sit in similarly shaped routs in the body, you need to check that the host guitar you have in mind has the correct-size routs. Fishman's helpful dimension chart puts its P90 at 34.9mm by 85.17mm – the pickup slightly flares out from the top to the bottom so these are the base dimensions. Measuring the PRS pickups at the widest point as they sit above the top, we get 34.82mm by 85.57mm. Close enough. The Fluence soapbars are a little deeper than most at 22.33mm (including the hook-up pins on the base), which may cause a problem, not least at the neck position if the body rout is cut for a less-deep soapbar [pic 3].

Typically, a soapbar such as this has a 'cushion' under the pickup to allow some basic height adjustment once the pickups are secured via the two mounting/adjustment screws. Fishman supplies some rubber tubing for this purpose, but some hard foam rubber (as you might get with a new pickup) works well, too.

Active pickups, of course, need power. Fishman makes a universal rechargeable battery, but you can still run the Fluence pickups from a good ol' nine-volt block battery so long as there's room in the control cavity [pic 4]. Fishman quotes a battery life for the set of up to 60 hours.

Because the Fluence pickups have a low-impedance output you'll need to remove the volumes and tones and replace them with 25kohm pots. Two standard pots plus two pots with pull-push switches are provided, all with a 8mm diameter threaded posts, but those threads aren't long enough to fit on a carved top Les Paul. You can retain your pickup selector switch, but you will need to replace the 'mono' jack output socket with the provided 'stereo' ring/sleeve/tip type.

to gig, you simply might find you like Voice 2 of the bridge pickup, for example, and Voice 1 of the neck pickup – Fishman explains how to achieve that so you don't need those pull-switch pots for a simple, direct drive.

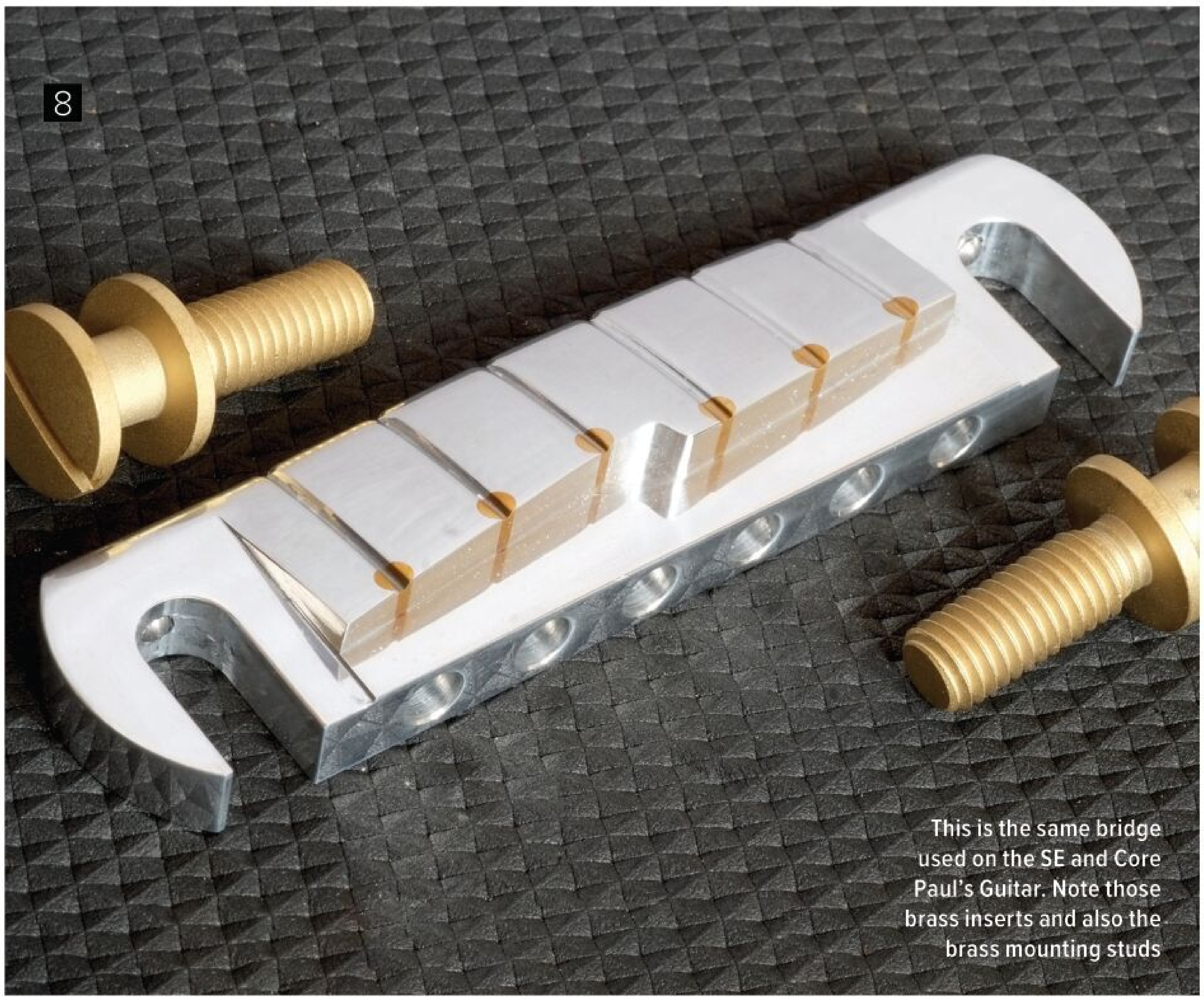
## Upgrades?

Paul Reed Smith is an avid tinkerer, constantly improving specifications and parts. Our host SE dates back to 2008 and plenty has changed since then. With many parts and pickups available from PRS directly, it's an easy job to upgrade your old-spec guitar.

A favourite quote from Paul is this: "One of my sayings is that everything that touches the string is God – well, that's really the bridge, the nut, and the tuners." This goal has led to all sorts of upgrades to the hardware used by PRS, not least unplated brass tuner posts and bridge studs, and a return on many instruments to old-school bone top nuts. So, to bring our lowly SE up to spec I ordered up a set of SE locking tuners [pics 5, 6 and 7], a new Stoptail bridge with those brass inserts at the string

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

8



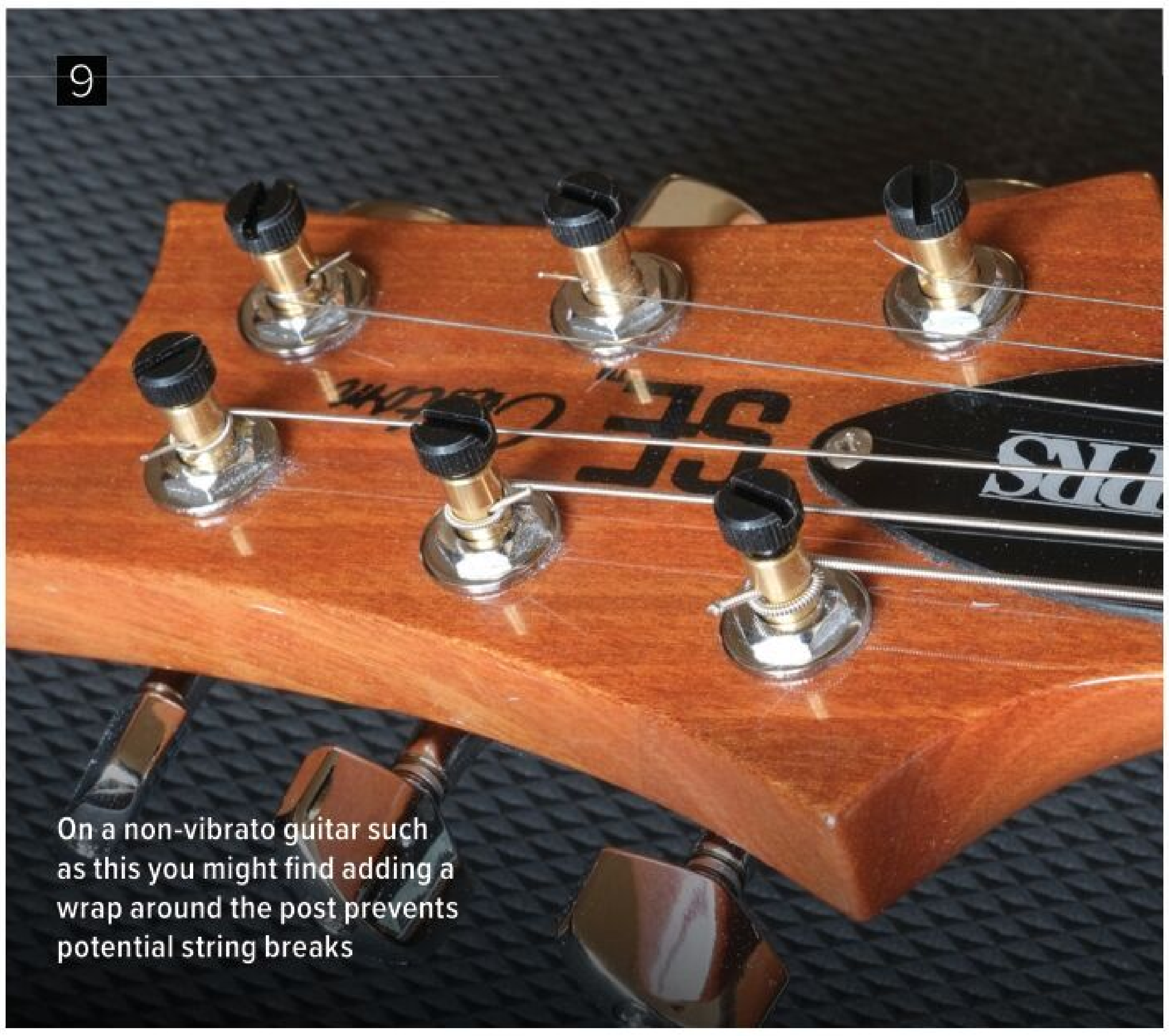
This is the same bridge used on the SE and Core Paul's Guitar. Note those brass inserts and also the brass mounting studs

## WHAT'S THE COST?

**New pickups, tuners, bridge and a top nut all add to the modding cost. So here's a list of our spends:**

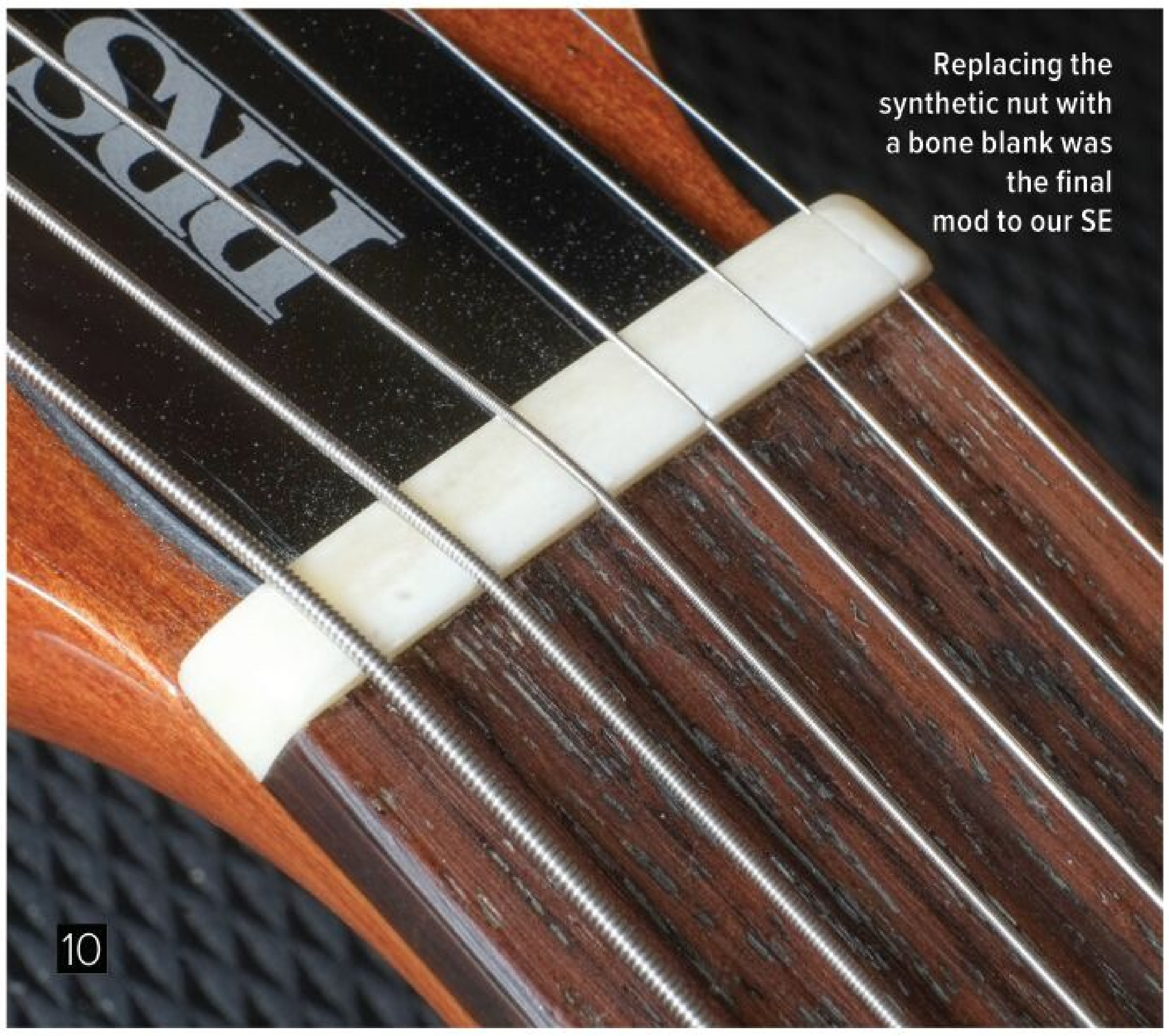
- **Fishman Fluence Signature Series Greg Koch Gristle-Tone P90 pickup set:$719 www.fishman.com**
- **PRS SE Locking Tuners: $139**
- **PRS Stoptail Studs (Metric) Unplated Polished Brass: $30**
- **PRS Stoptail Bridge (with studs) Unplated Polished Aluminium: $300**
- **WD Music Bone Nut Blank for Gibson: $12**

9



On a non-vibrato guitar such as this you might find adding a wrap around the post prevents potential string breaks

10



Replacing the synthetic nut with a bone blank was the final mod to our SE

break points [pic 8], while I replaced the standard synthetic nut with bone. While that Stoptail comes with USA (imperial) studs, you can buy metric studs so the bridge will fit on an SE such as ours. With the exception of cutting the nut blank, retrofitting the new tuners and bridge is dead simple as they're simple drop-in parts. Easy.

### The Results

Not for the first time, a seemingly simple pickup swap turned into a pretty major overhaul. To be fair, there's nothing difficult in fitting the pickups or the necessary new pots, output jack and battery. Likewise, the additional PRS parts dropped into our SE with no issues. Even the new nut [pic 10] (I'd ordered a Gibson-style blank) was a pretty simple swap – although if you can't do that sort of thing then PRS does offer pre-cut bone nuts. Before we plug in you can hear a pristine and lively response. So, yes, it's a lowly guitar, but it is up to current PRS spec with the new hardware, and if these Fluence pickups sound like a bag o' nails I can't blame the guitar.

**"A superb studio-quality sound that's instantly variable and noiseless"**

Thankfully, of course, they don't. First off, there's zero hum, and on this semi-solid lightweight platform, Voice 1 at the bridge is a pretty beefy single-coil-flavoured sound. At the neck there's a very familiar smoother voice, which is very similar to my gigging PJD Carey Standard with its Cream T Duke P90. Voice 2 isn't chalk and cheese but adds in a little more beef and seems to round the highs a little. At the bridge it's dangerously close to our 1957 Gibson Les Paul Junior reference, although that has more sizzle in the highs. The neck, meanwhile, is really quite humbucking in sound, a little thicker with Santana-esque smoothness. Voice 3 is less P-90-like and sounds more like a Fender single coil, less wide, and seems the cleanest in terms of output. I spent plenty of time comparing these P-90s to others on different guitars: from Bare Knuckle (Blue Note 90) and a custom-wound Häussel P-90.

Fishman's descriptions of the available sounds are accurate, but these active Fluence pickups do provide a different experience to passive pickups, not least that the volume control is like a studio fader – it doesn't change the sound, just the output level. The tone has a slow roll-off and isn't excessive in terms of the treble cut. Fitted to the modded SE, they produce a superb studio-quality sound that's instantly variable and completely noiseless.

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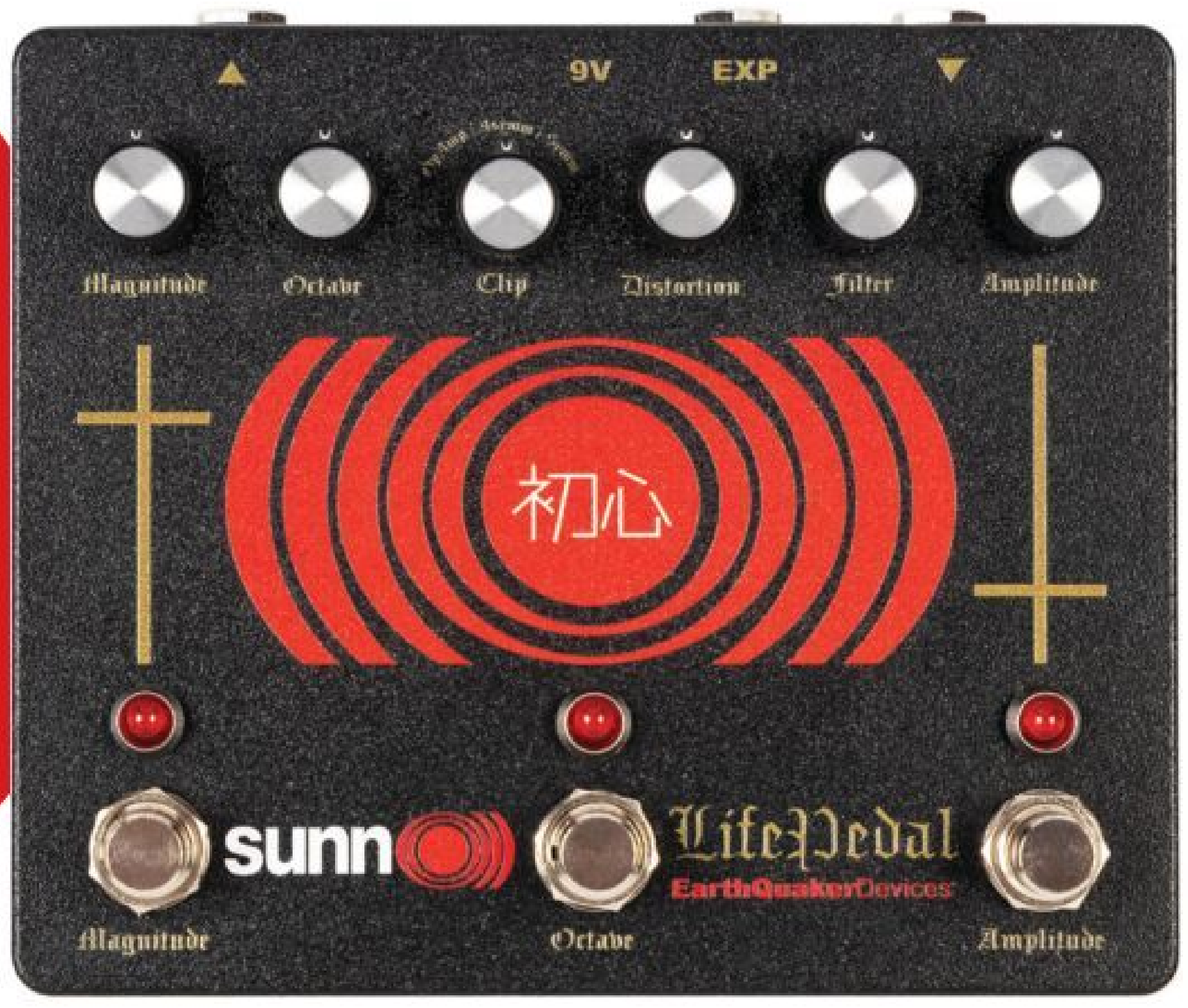

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## FENDER MONONEON JAZZ BASS V

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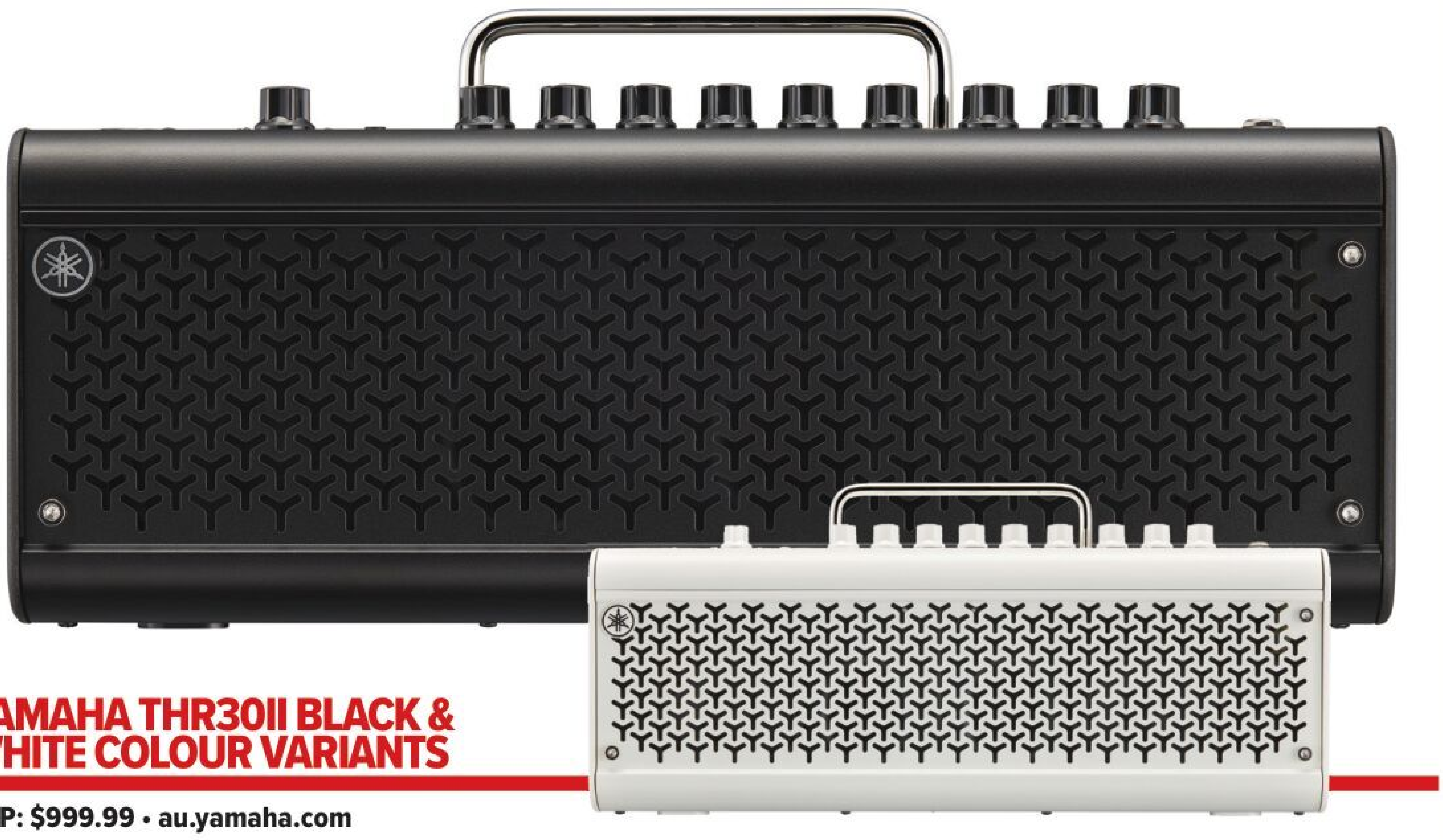
The MonoNeon Jazz Bass V features an alder body finished in an eye-popping neon yellow urethane finish, complemented by a neon orange painted headstock and pickguard. The 22-fret one-piece roasted maple neck features a 10"-14" compound radius fingerboard and elegant white pearl block inlays. Custom-wound Fireball 5-string Bass Humbucking pickups deliver fat, punchy tone while the 18v active preamp with 3-band EQ provides flexible tone-shaping for any style of music. The Fender HiMass string-through/top-load bridge provides increased resonance and sustain, and the gold hardware adds to the distinctive look of this stunning bass.



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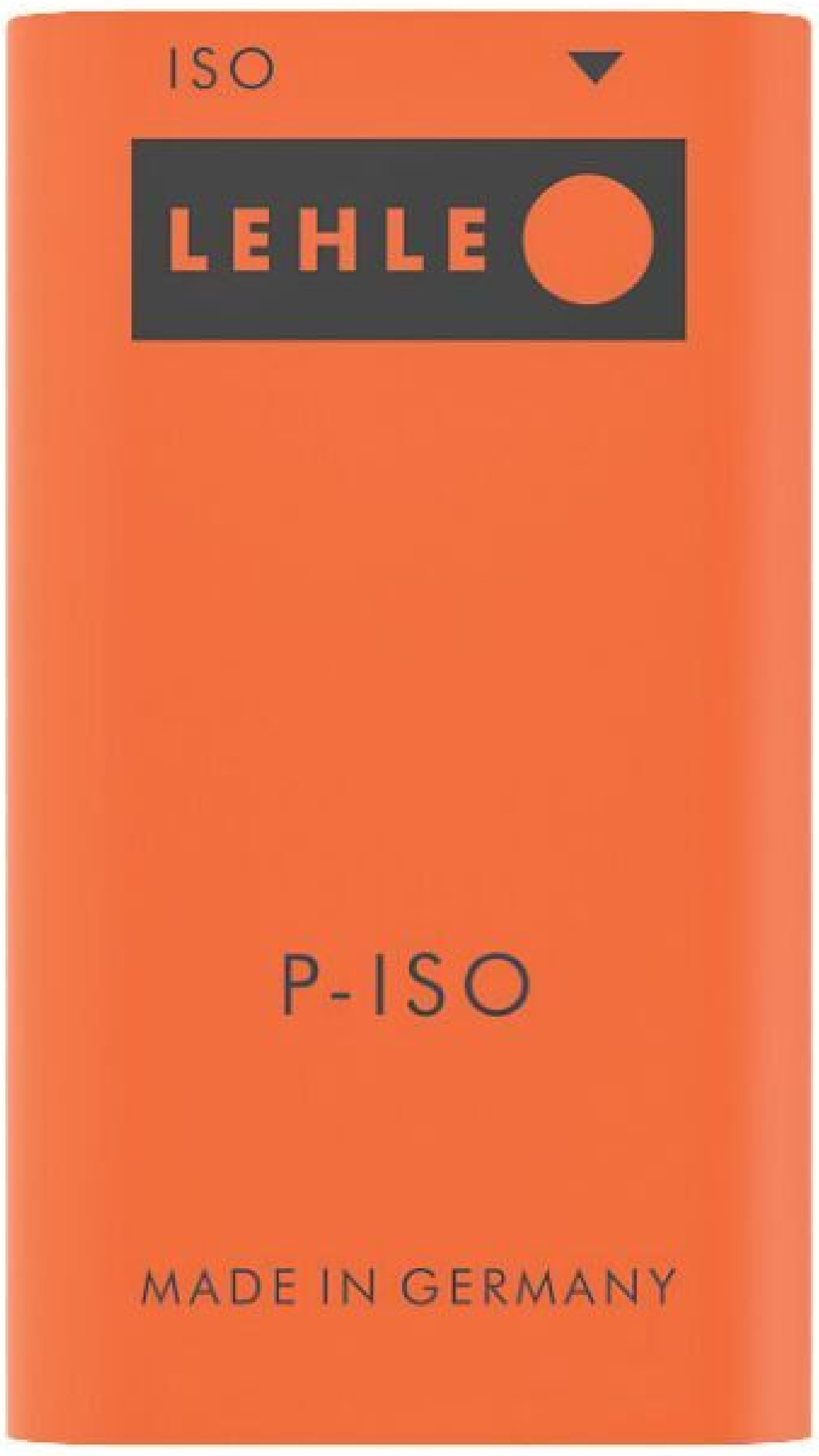
The Lehle P-ISO isolator and DI box combines passive isolation with the highest possible signal fidelity. Its applications range from isolation and eliminating hum, to balancing and reamplification along with any signal routing that requires a clean signal free from noise. The classic application for the LEHLE P-ISO is as a hum suppressor. Frequently background noise caused by ground loops occurs when two electronic devices are connected to each other. The LEHLE P-ISO provides a simple, but extremely effective remedy when installed between the two units. Using the ISO output, the devices are galvanically isolated and background noise becomes a thing of the past.



ERNIE BALL
COMFORT SLIDE
SOFT TOUCH INSERT
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## ERNIE BALL COMFORT SLIDE

**RRP: $54.95 • cmcmusic.com.au**

Upgrade your slide performance with unsurpassed comfort and control. The Ernie Ball comfort slide is fitted with a soft inner sleeve for a secure fit, giving you maximum control as you slide up and down the fretboard. The brightly coloured sleeve keeps visibility high in dark environments and provides a soft cushiony barrier from the slides' rolled metal edge. Suitable for electric and acoustic guitars, this slide features smooth, durable, black chrome plated brass that allows the notes to ring out with a bright, chimey tone and maximum sustain.

## TONE CITY MATCHA CREAM FUZZ

**RRP: $119 • egm.com.au**

If you want classic fuzz tones from a compact pedal that can easily be squeezed into any crevice on your pedal-board — the Tone City Matcha Cream is perfect for you! It's mini size is definitely deceiving though, as this tiny stomp-box can deliver huge "wall-of-sound" fuzz that even the most scrupulous of shoe-gazers will admire. Simple Control Set Part of the appeal of Tone City's pedals is their simplicity. With just three dials, the Matcha Cream allows you to easily adjust its gain ('Sustain') and volume levels, with a single 'Tone' EQ dial giving you precise control over the highs. Keep the tone low for sludgy, doom-metal guitar riffs, or crank it to really cut through the mix.

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# AUSTRALIAN recording TECHNIQUE

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## FOOLS GOLD

John Leckie on producing The Stone Roses

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**LESSON**

IN THE MIX: GETTING GUITARS TO SOUND RIGHT

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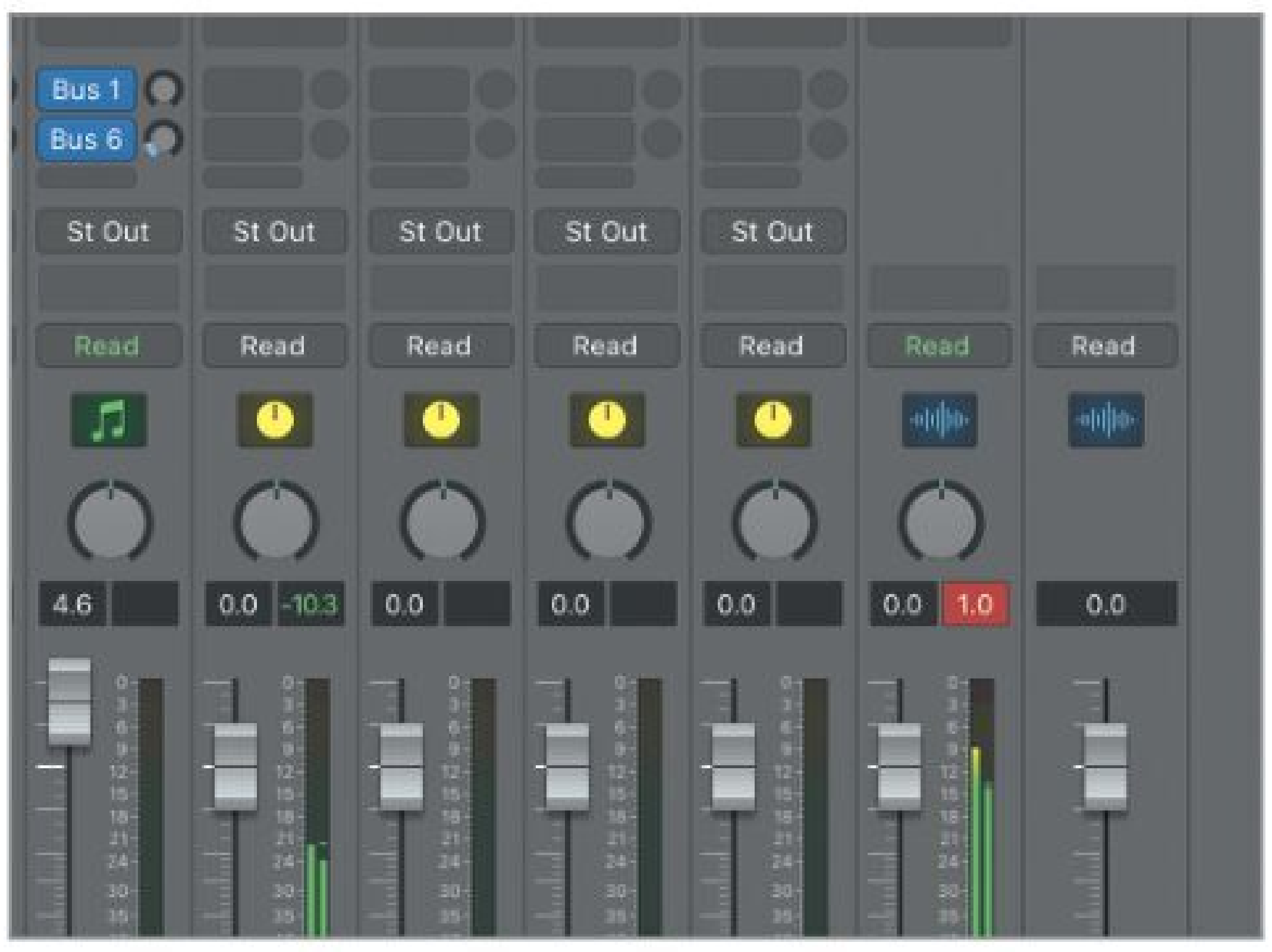
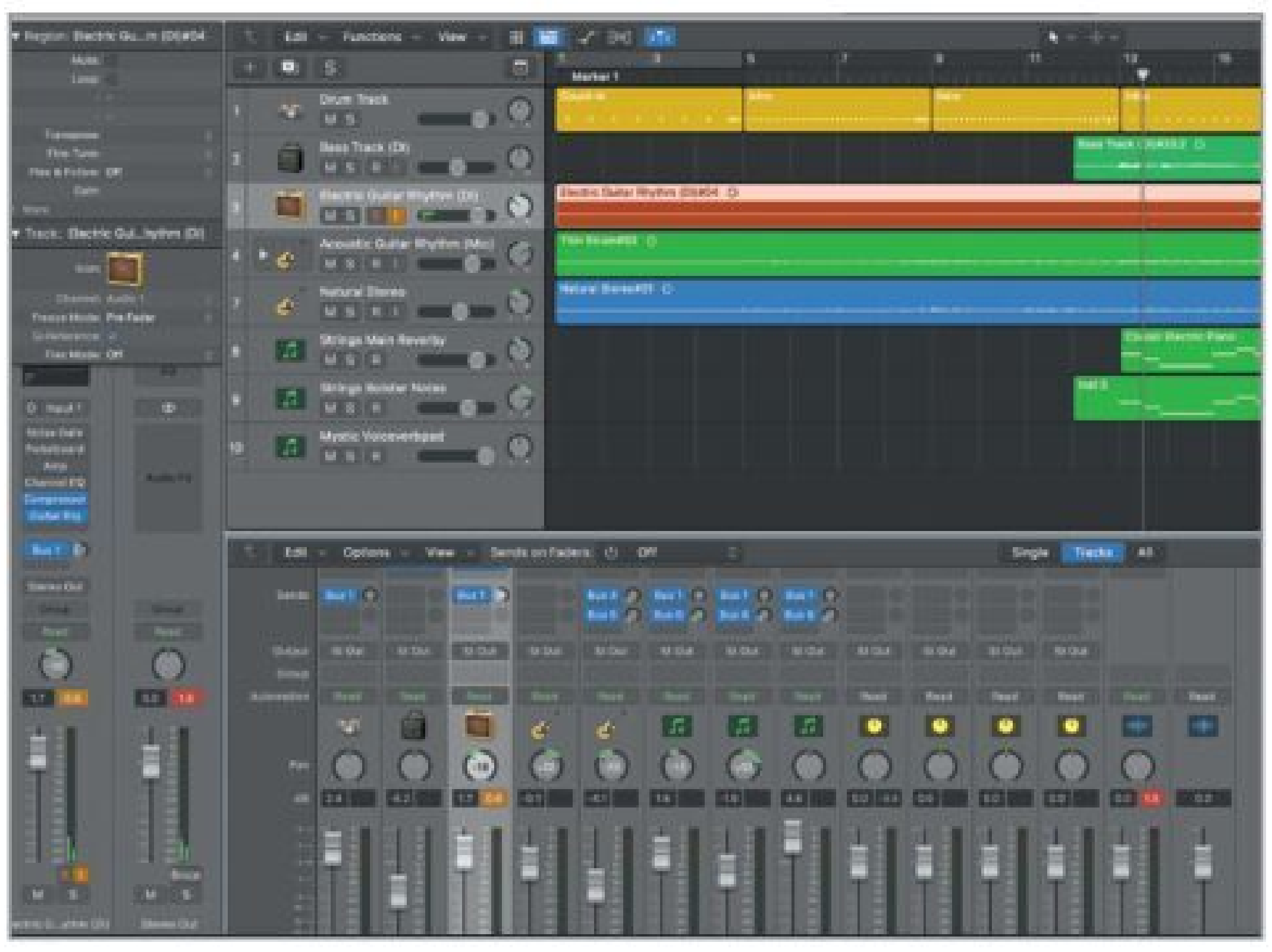
# NINE SIMPLE STEPS FOR MIXING GUITAR

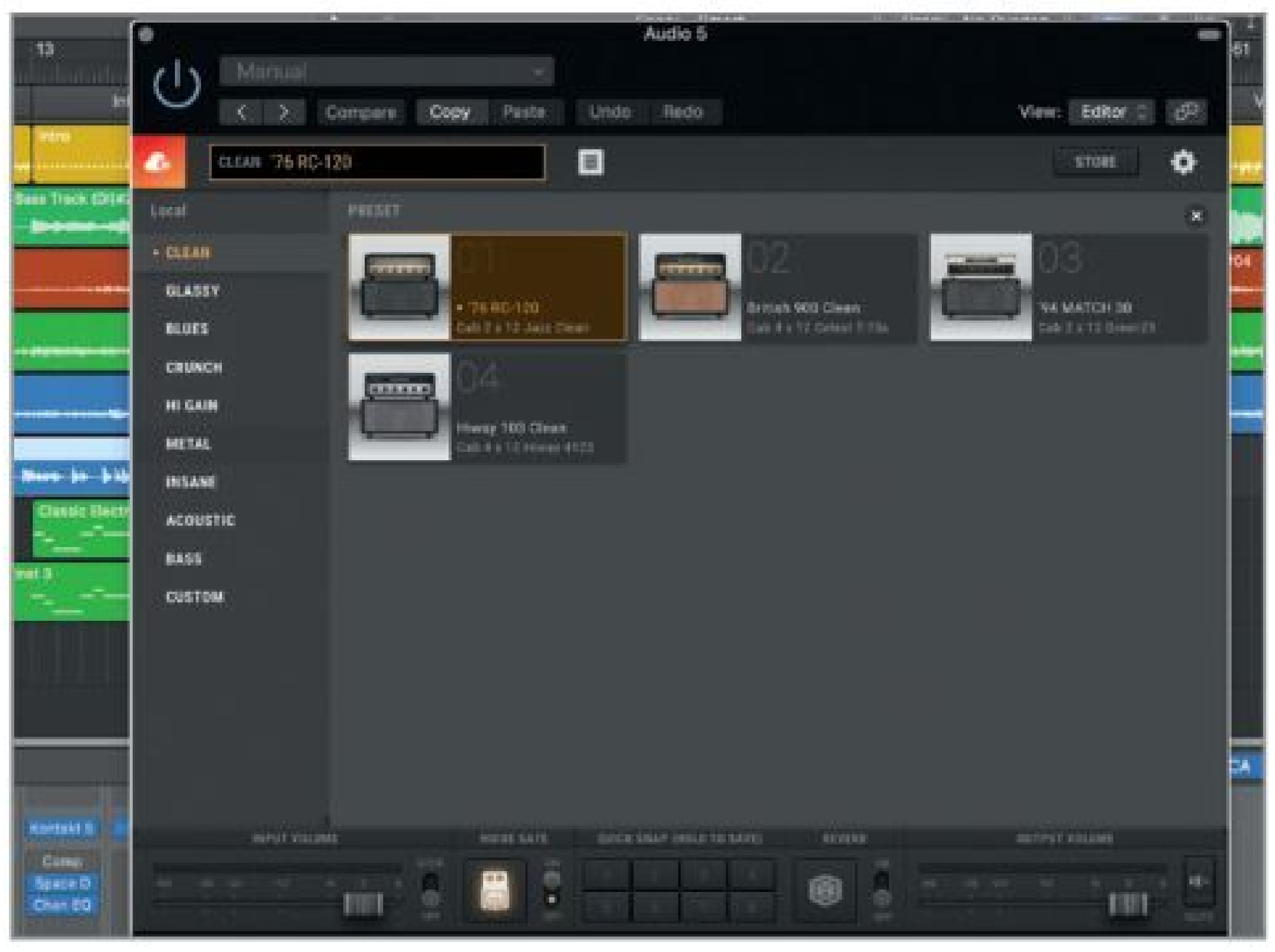
You've got the tone right, but what about levels? Part one of a two part series.


Bus 1
Bus 6
St Out
Read

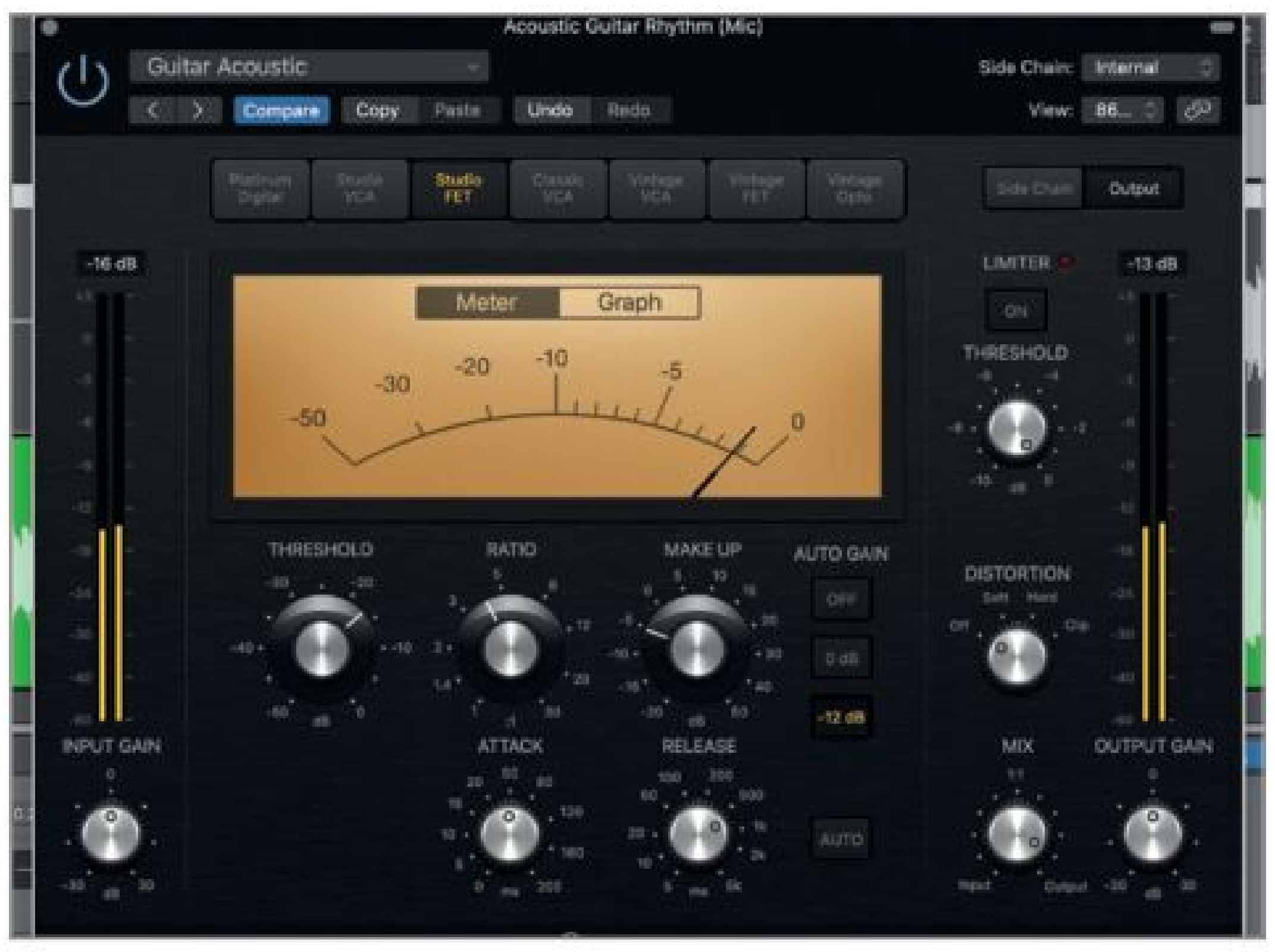
**1** The first step to achieving a great guitar sound in your mix is to make sure you've captured it at a tolerable level, and not too high a volume that you're peaking the input signal. Keep your eye on the red, because if you've got a crackly sound, it's hard to fix later.



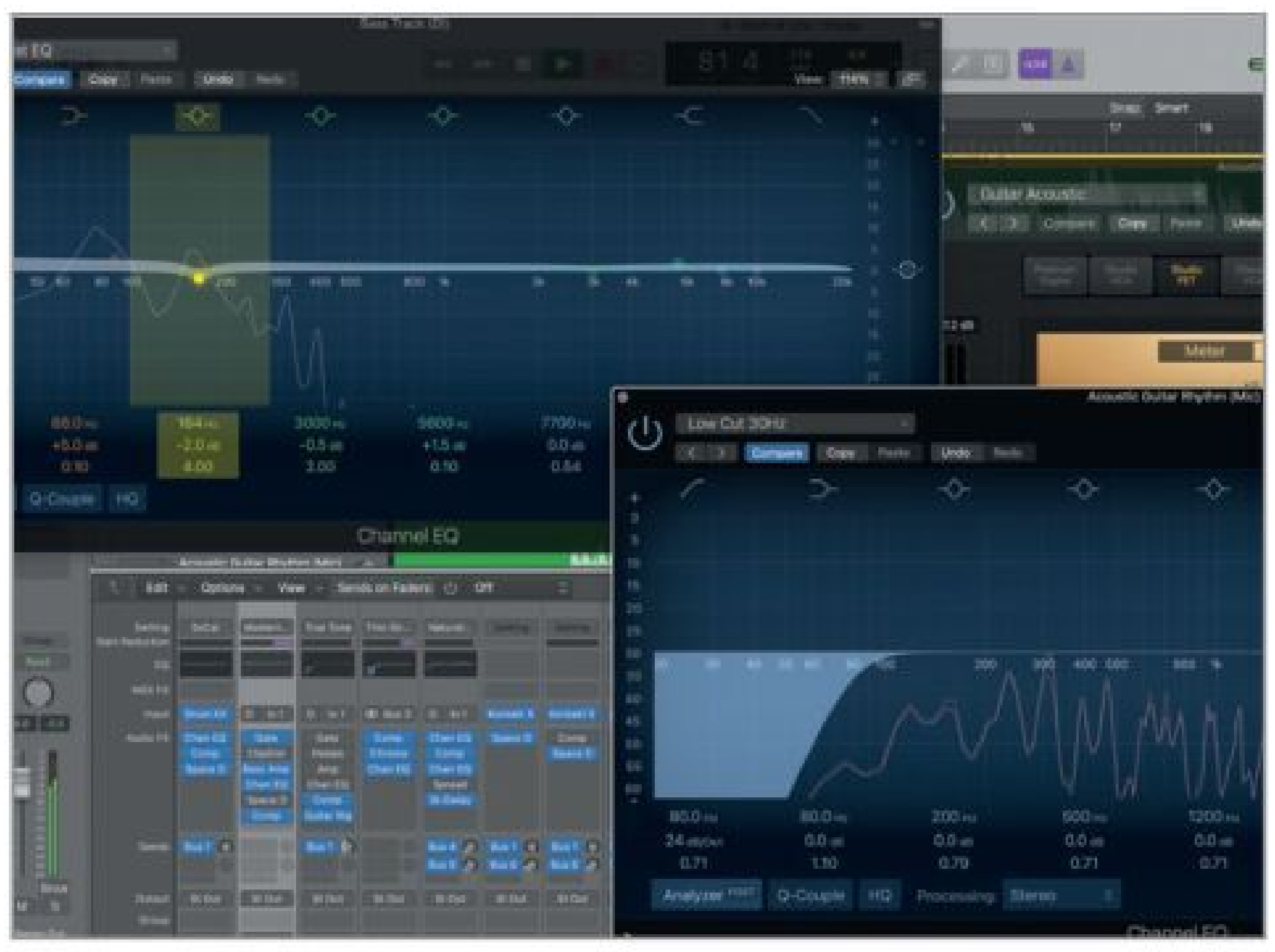
**2** Every DAW provides a different layout and a set of tools, though there are some established methods for sculpting your guitar sound to exist comfortably in a mix. Here we're working in Logic, on a track that features a full band, as well as a virtual string section.



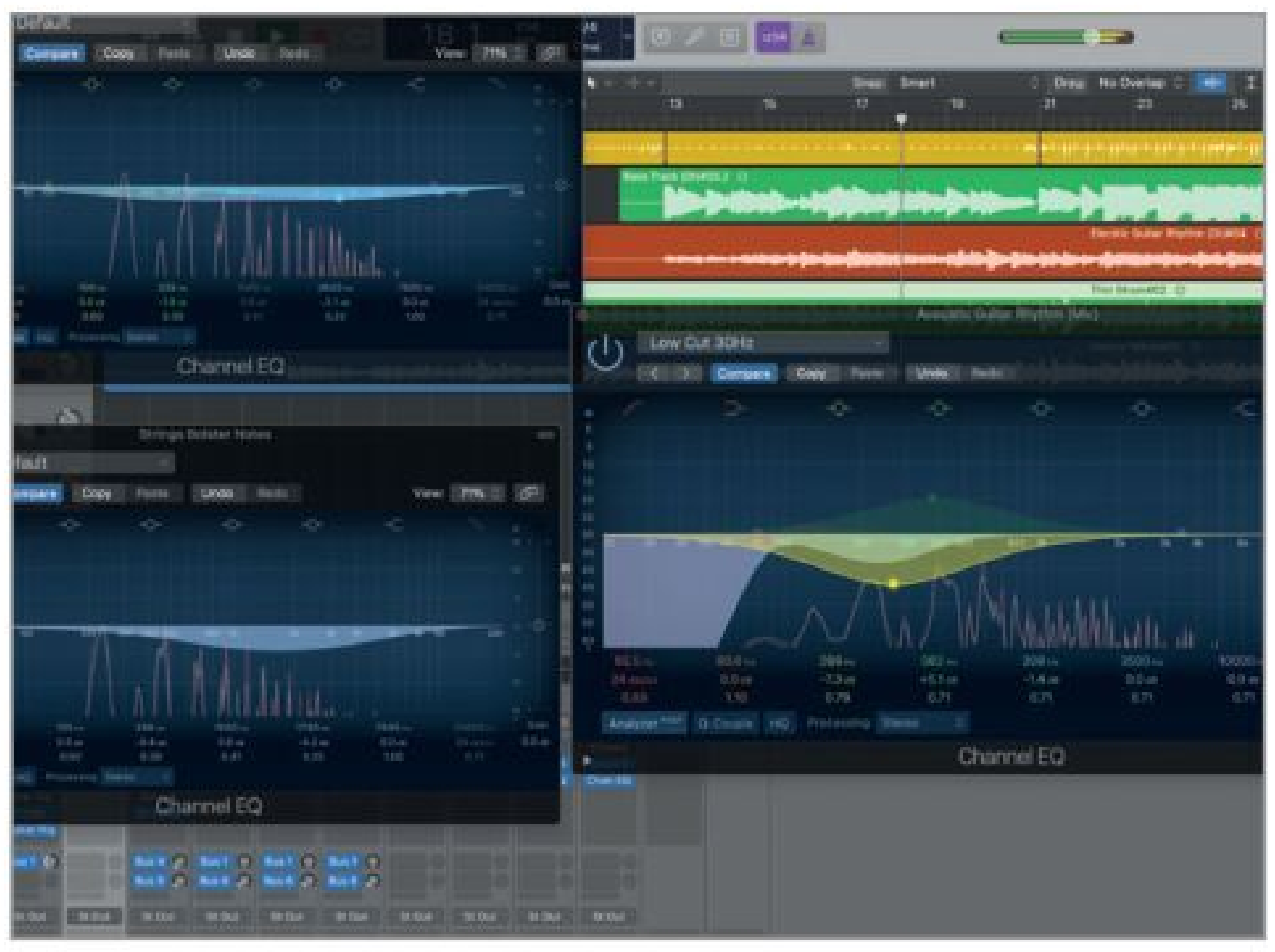
**3** It's key to get a handle on the overall shape of the track, and how you'd like your guitar parts to sound. Do you want acoustic rhythms, or spotlight moment lead solos? Each requires unique tone choices, but the fundamental mixing consideration of both is to be aware of the position of your instrument in the frequency spectrum.


Guitar Acoustic
Meter
Graph
THRESHOLD
RATIO
MAKE UP
AUTO GAIN
ATTACK
RELEASE
INPUT GAIN
DISTORTION
MIX
OUTPUT GAIN
LIMITER

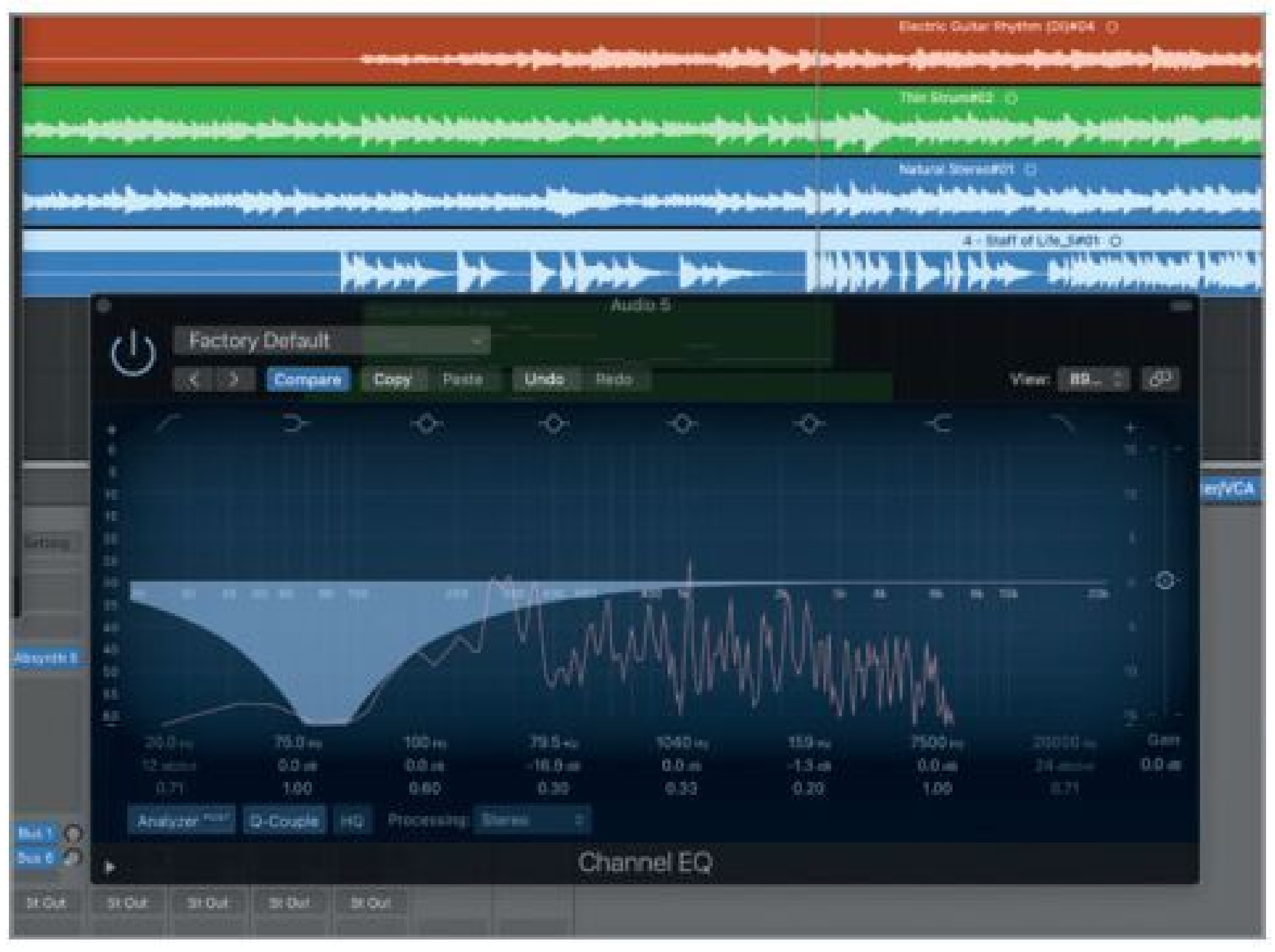
**4** Our acoustic guitar underpins the rhythm of the track, and was recorded via a room mic to get some natural reverb imbued into it. Using Logic's Studio FET Compressor, we've made sure the Attack is set to a middle, so we're not trimming the natural sound of the strum, but we are cutting some of its peaky harshness. We've added a touch of Auto-Gain too.


Channel EQ
Low Cut 30Hz

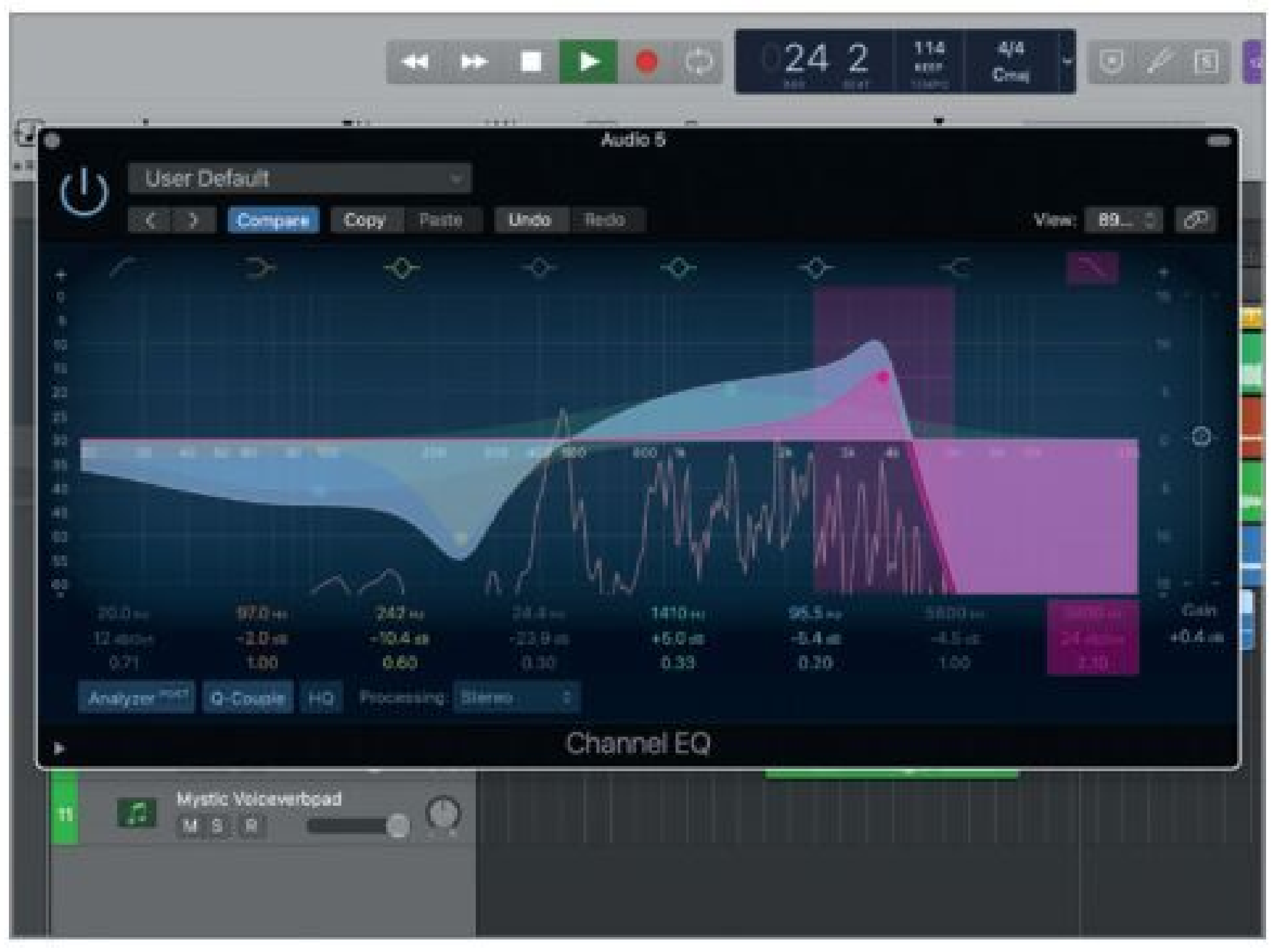
**5** As we have an impactful bass pre-recorded, we want to make sure our acoustic guitar isn't emitting any low-end frequencies that will muddy the waters. Take a look at the EQ readings for your rhythm guitar and main bass instrument. As there was frequency replication, we've applied a cut to all frequencies under 100Hz on our acoustic guitar.


Channel EQ
Low Cut 30Hz
Channel EQ

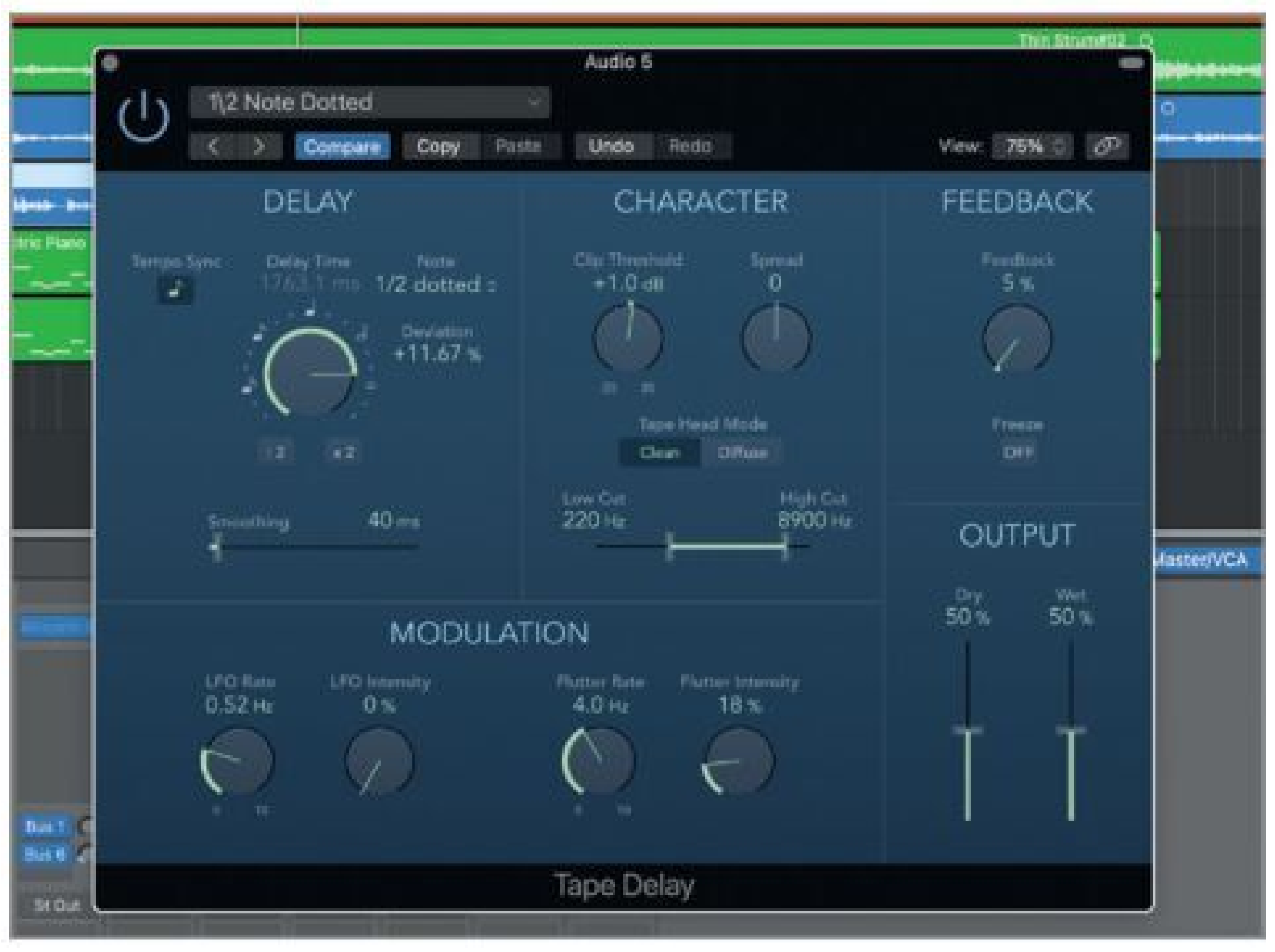
**6** Sometimes the rival frequencies may be in different areas of the sound spectrum, so rather than applying a broad sweep of frequency reduction, it helps to get specific. Look at the EQ of the other tracks in your mix, and get more forensic with your EQ filtering. This can enhance your guitar's prominence (or the other instrument).


Factory Default
Channel EQ

**7** For lead guitar, or more defined riffs, it's important to never solo them in isolation, and always work on them in context with the rest of the track. You might find that the higher pitched you get, the more noise can be introduced in the higher frequencies, and low frequencies again need to be tamed.


User Default
Channel EQ
Mystic Voiceverbpad

**8** Boosting some of the very specific higher frequencies around the 3-4kHz range, while reducing others, can bring out greater clarity for your instrument, particularly when you're working on guitar solos around other instruments in the mix. This will vary depending on the intensity of your track.


1/2 Note Dotted
DELAY
CHARACTER
FEEDBACK
OUTPUT
MODULATION
Tape Delay

**9** While EQ'ing is where we can really establish each instrument's designated area on the frequency stage, the use of effects can further enhance and lift out your guitar track, but be mindful you don't undo your good work. A touch of delay can help to thicken a solitary lead line, with Logic's Tape Delay adding some extra analogue warmth.

Photo by Joe Dilworth/Avalon/Getty Image

# PRODUCER JOHN LECKIE LOOKS BACK ON RECORDING THE STONE ROSES CLASSIC I AM THE RESURRECTION

Having created a storm of industry attention throughout 1988, flirting with indie label Rough Trade before signing to Silvertone, The Stone Roses went in to the studio with producer John Leckie and set about recording one of the greatest debut albums ever made.

Words by **Matt Frost**

Fusing the acid house hedonism that had come to define the late '80s with the jangly guitar sound characterised by Johnny Marr in The Smiths, the Roses were on the brink of becoming Britain's biggest band.

While legal wrangles, inter-band disputes and a torturous five-year gestation period for follow-up album Second Coming meant the Roses would never fulfil their potential, they were about to unleash an era-shaping record of stunning musicianship, paving the way for the Britpop revolution that would follow.

And in guitarist John Squire they had a natural successor to Marr; an indie virtuoso who combined chiming chorus-infused melodic runs with formidable blues riffing – a new British guitar legend in the making.

Squire was usually meticulous about working out every part he played before he hit the studio, and

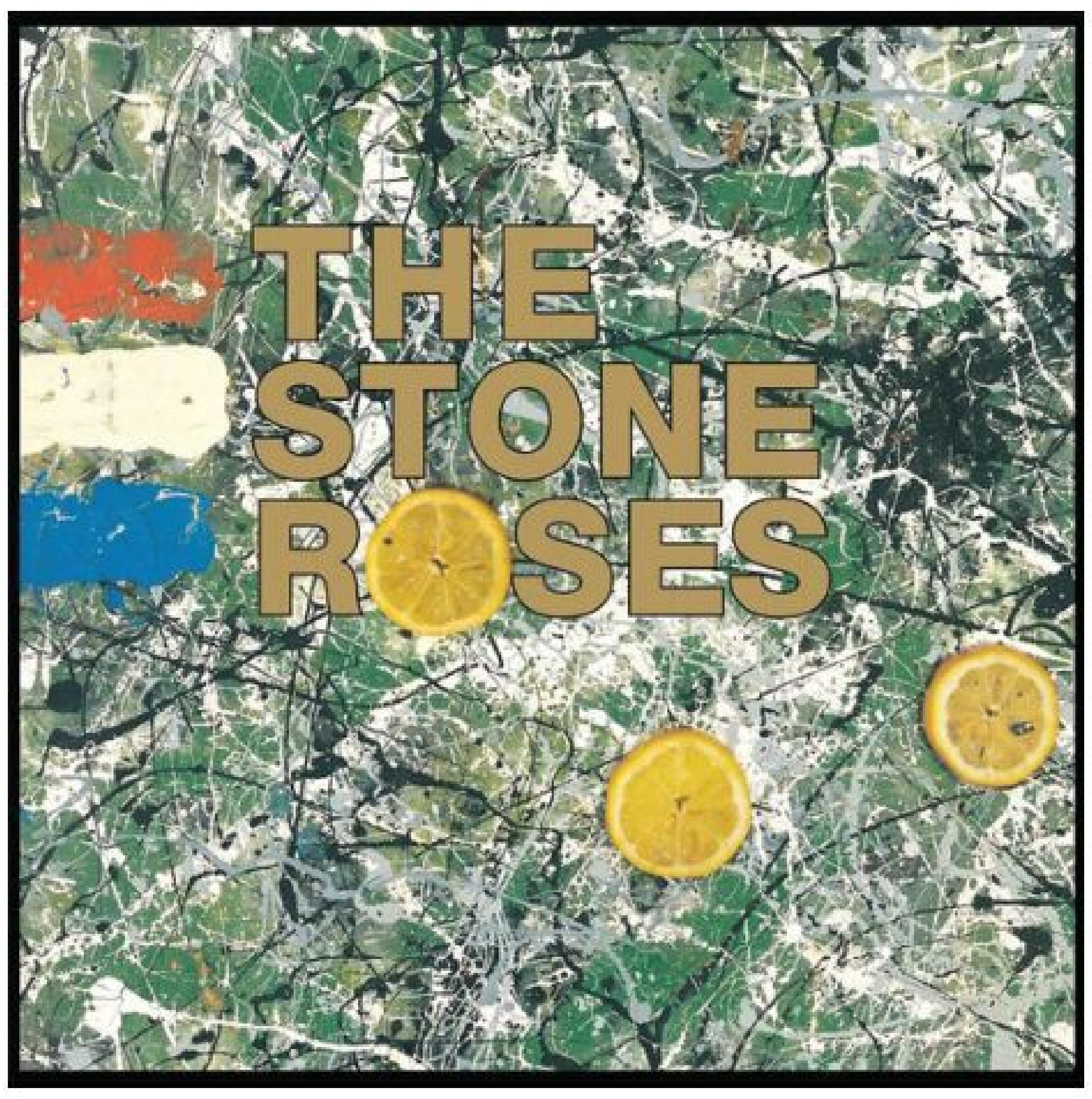
that approach was evident in the ease with which I Am The Resurrection was recorded. It was one of the last tracks the Roses and Leckie worked on at Rockfield Studios, in Wales.

With the previously improvised and chaotic end section having been pinned down to a more organised arrangement, under the supervision of Leckie, the majority of the track was committed to tape quickly and with few obstacles. The producer believes this was due in no small part to Squire's fastidious preparation.

"Even from the beginning, he had his own little cassette portastudio, and he would set up a little room or a cupboard somewhere and work his parts out," Leckie told Total Guitar in 2011. "He'd do a rough mix of the backing track or a demo and, even when we finished at midnight or two o'clock in the morning, he'd go back to his cupboard and work some more parts out!"

When engineer Paul Schroeder pressed record on the tape machine, the Roses managed to nail the majority of I Am The Resurrection's backing track in just one take. "Because we'd worked so much on the end, it was pretty straight ahead when we went back and did the whole song," explained Leckie. "I'm sure the backing track was done all in one go, but the end part, with the acoustic guitars – the last minute or so – that was added on later and I think you can tell because the drums sound different… I can remember doing those picking acoustics at Konk [The Kinks' Studio in Muswell Hill]."

The backing track consisted of Alan 'Reni' Wren's drums, Gary 'Mani' Mounfield's bass, Squire's rhythm guitar and a guide vocal from Ian Brown. Leckie reckons there were up to eight guitar overdubs laid down at Rockfield. As far as instruments go, there was some early experimentation, although the Roses always tended to revert to the gear that gave them their classic sound.



"One of the things that happened right from the beginning was that – because the record company had an equipment hire company called Dreamhire in the same building [as Battery Studios, in Willesden Green] – we could hire anything," reflected Leckie. "Any amps, any guitars they wanted… they could just go round to the warehouse and pick some out, so of course there was a bit of dithering with 'Oh, what guitar should I use? What amp should I use?' Can we try a different bass?' but you'd end up using what they'd got originally because that's the sound!

"Mani's painted Rickenbacker bass, always through an [Ampeg] SVT cabinet… and John had a Hofner, a bit like a Gibson 335, but it was a Hofner. He used that sometimes, but his main guitar was a pink Stratocaster from Dreamhire, which I think he ended up buying.

"Then he always hired a silver/black Fender Twin Reverb with JBL speakers. We always used that just because it sounded fantastic, and that's probably what he used on most tracks [including I Am The Resurrection]. I can't really remember the acoustic guitars. He also had an Ibanez Overdrive – although a lot of the time he didn't use it – and an Ibanez Chorus, and that was the classic sound!"

Leckie remembered he used a Shure SM56 and a Neumann U67 on Squire's amp, with "the two of them together mic'd pretty close, almost touching the grill, just off the centre of the cone." For acoustics, he used a U67, and for Mani's bass a Neumann U47 or an AKG D12 on the SVT cab.

Squire's playing across the instrumental crescendo of …Resurrection sounds unlike much of his work on The Stone Roses. It has a riffed-up Hendrix-y feel, reminiscent of the heavier, bluesier style on 1994's Second Coming. So was this a new way of playing that John was beginning to experiment with in the late '80s? "If you saw them live at the time, [John] was playing a lot like that," Leckie tells us. "It was much more rocking live!"

Things began to go pear-shaped at the end of 1990, when the Roses began a legal battle with their record company Silvertone. The case, which the band eventually won, meant they were unable to release new music for two years. It marked the beginning of the end for the Roses, who – some argue – had the potential to be the biggest British band since The Beatles and the Stones. But their legacy lives on, not least through The Stone Roses.

"I knew it was going to be good, but I didn't think I'd still be talking about it 20 years later!" laughs Leckie. "But that's because of people loving them – and it's the songs and music magazines voting it the best record of all time. That's what's kept it alive."

RRP: $1,349

SHURE
SE846
SE846

# Shure SE846 Pro

Professional sound-isolating earphones with quad high-definition micro drivers. **Review by Dave Clews**

Famous for the ubiquitous SM58 dynamic microphone that's been practically a legal requirement centre-stage at live music venues for decades, Shure are one of the true pro audio heavyweights. The Shure SE846 Pro is their current flagship professional earphone with balanced armature drivers, aimed at music professionals and discerning domestic users alike - and it carries a price tag to match.

Unsurprisingly for such a premium-priced product, you get a lot of bits and bobs in the box. The packaging is suitably high-end, with a glossy, printed user guide, a Shure-branded polishing cloth plus a nifty little zip-up travel case. This 'fit kit' contains a spare detachable audio cable, soft flex sleeves and foam sleeves in three different sizes, a set of triple-flange sleeves, a 1/4" adapter, plus a tool kit for changing the nozzle inserts in order to adapt the frequency response.

The clear plastic earbud casing means that the sophisticated internal componentry is on display, giving them a purposeful, high-tech look, and the cables detach via a sturdy push-click fitting. Once attached, they are able to swivel through a full 360 degrees so that the ideal position can be achieved with a bit of fiddling about. The cable itself is stiff enough at the earbud end to retain its shape as you fold it over and behind the ear. As it stands, there's no Bluetooth functionality with these, although this can be added by purchasing the BT2 Bluetooth cable or the True Wireless Secure Fit Adapter as optional extras.

If you're one of those people that takes a while to - literally - get your head around a new pair of in-ear monitors, these won't be the easiest to begin with. It's not immediately obvious how to wear them, especially if you're not that used to earbuds generally. There are no discernible L/R markings on the clear casing - we had to look at the picture in the user guide to figure out the correct orientation in the ear, not to mention which was the right bud and which was the left. (Clue: the red one goes in the right ear!)

Once we'd figured out which bud goes in which ear and which way up the cable exits need to be oriented (they need to be pointing at your temples), we found these to be actually pretty comfortable with the default pads. Even if they weren't, there's no shortage of alternative inserts available to swap and try - this kind of trial and error-based exploration period is, after all, part and parcel of any earphone experience, regardless of the level of sophistication - but the fact that we were able to get on so well with the default offering shows that Shure have done their homework on this aspect.

Under the hood you'll find four high-definition drivers, splitting the audible frequency range into four distinct bands, one of which is a low-pass filter designed to deliver true subwoofer performance. According to Shure, this prevents the output of the low-frequency drivers interfering with the mid and high-frequency drivers, resulting in unparalleled performance across the range.

For tinkerers who are brave enough to partially dismantle and reassemble an expensive pair of earbuds for the sake of experimentation, there are three interchangeable filter inserts supplied - one fitted as standard for a balanced response, one for extra warmth and another for extra brightness - should you find the default sound not quite up to your expectations. Of the three, we favoured the default balanced option over the other two - although the warmth filter did sound luxuriously warm and smooth, the treble-boosting option proved a tad unforgiving for our tastes.

The SE846's feature unusually low impedance for a professional product - only 9Ω - so you really don't need to drive these hard at all. In our tests with a 2019 MacBook Pro, setting the volume control around a third of the way up was enough to deliver ample levels of loudness.

So the big question is, do they sound good enough to warrant the extra outlay over and above other IEM's costing hundreds less? Perceived value is always a contentious issue with high-end in-ears - they rarely appear visually distinct from much cheaper alternatives, so the air of luxury is usually not so apparent. This makes the elevated price point for the SE846's immediately harder to justify.

Sound-wise though, the SE846's are truly superb, to the point where it's difficult to find source material to do them justice. Sound isolation is excellent, but the really good news is the crystal-clear reproduction across the board with the standard nozzle assembly fitted. The immediate impression is a broadly flat response - firmly inserted with the required proper seal into the ear canal, there's no woolly, over-pronounced bass, the low end instead coming across tight and punchy with just the right amount of presence in the subs. Mids are as clear and present as the danger in a Tom Clancy novel, and the highs are refined and detailed without being at all harsh.

The soundstage is appropriately deep and wide for a set of pro-level IEM's, making for a highly enjoyable listening experience whatever your musical tastes. The clarity is outstanding and we found them equally as satisfying listening to classical and jazz as we did EDM and mainstream pop.

Those four high-def drivers cope admirably with any genre, revealing the rise and fall of the damper pedal in Ludovico Einaudi's 'Le Onde'. The individual instrument parts in Donald Fagen's I.G.Y. have never been more discernible to our ears. Green Day's 'American Idiot' has never sounded more ballsy and Pendulum's 'The Island Part II' got us one step closer to understanding how Rob Swire pulled off those insane programming tricks.

The SE846 Pros proved especially revealing when monitoring our own tracks however, highlighting their appeal as a studio monitoring solution - trial mixes produced on these translated particularly well to other systems, which is a big tick in the box if you're a music producer.

If you're committing to this level of investment, you need a product you can trust, and the SE846 Pros deliver in spades in this regard, providing a beautifully balanced sound with excellent low-frequency performance and customisable high-mid response. With the reassurance and reputation for durability that comes with the Shure name, these make for a comfortable, well-built and superb-sounding investment that your ears will Shurely thank you for.

## ▶ VERDICT

**Delivering outstanding detail and clarity across the board, these top-of-the-line pro IEM's are some of the most capable earphones we've heard.**

## ▶ PROS

- Superb sound.
- Quadruple high def drivers.
- Plenty of customization options.

## ▶ CONS

- Expensive.
- Bluetooth costs more.

## ▶ CONTACT

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RRP: $1,399 - $1,499

# Breedlove Eco Pursuit EX S Concert Sweetgrass

An acoustic guitar where sustainability and ecological common sense are first and foremost in its design and construction. But do all these good intentions add up to a great-sounding instrument?

**Review by David Mead**

In recent years we've witnessed guitar builders, both large and small, begin to seek out more sustainable and less controversial materials for use in their products. Alternatives to the more established timbers such as rosewood, spruce and certain strains of mahogany are being actively sought in the quest to find new champions with which to fuel our acoustic meanderings. As such, we have come across woods with strange-sounding names that put our traditionalist tendencies to the test. But a healthy dose of open-mindedness is essential on everyone's part if we're really serious about putting the planet's interests first. We've certainly found some really first-class acoustics recently where the woods initially seemed seriously off the beaten path, but the tones we heard from them confirmed their place in the pantheon of tonewoods.

As far as Breedlove is concerned, owner Tom Bedell has travelled far and wide to seek out timber that has been properly managed, taking the time to assess how its harvesting has affected local wildlife and the surrounding environment's general health. No clear-cut trees – that is, trees that have been harvested and replaced with man-made, non-environmentally sound plantations – are used. Salvaged wood or individually harvested trees from reputable suppliers is the name of the game hereabouts.

As the name suggests, Breedlove's ECO Pursuit range epitomises the company's green credentials and the guitar before us here is no exception. Designed in Bend, Oregon, and built in China, the Concert Sweetgrass is a handsome fellow and a large part of this is down to the timber used in its top. Breedlove has been a pioneering force with myrtlewood, the timber used for this acoustic's top, having used it for more than 25 years. Myrtlewood is also present in the guitar's back and sides, but here it is a laminate on top of mahogany. As a tonewood, it combines the attributes of rosewood, mahogany and maple with rich basses, mellow mids and sparkling trebles. But before we commit to a single strum, let's look at the other constituent parts of the Concert Sweetgrass.

The neck is African mahogany with a fingerboard of ovangkol that has been stained black, presumably to mimic the accustomed look of ebony. We're going to assume that this must have been an aesthetic choice on Breedlove's behalf in order that the colour sits well with the myrtlewood as ovangkol's natural colour resembles rosewood. Maybe it wouldn't have looked out of place in its natural state? Who knows. In any case, it's the same with the pin-free bridge, which is the same timber stained black. It's easy to see Breedlove's attention to aesthetic detailing here. The copper-coloured tuners, position markers and fretboard side dots sit very easily with the paleness of the myrtlewood and darkness of the ovangkol. Both the body and neck are trimmed with plastic tortoiseshell, too, which adds to the instrument's overall visual appeal.

Flip the body over to take a closer look at the neck and we can see it's a three-piece affair with a separate heel and a scarf joint to the base of the headstock. It's a satin finish, too, in contrast to the body's high-gloss lacquer.

Quality of workmanship is well up to the standard we have seen coming from Chinese workshops these days, and coupled with the top notch design, this is a very well thought out and good-looking acoustic.

For amplified use, the ECO Pursuit comes with a Fishman Presys under-saddle pickup and preamp, the latter boasting a simplified set of controls and an onboard tuner. Just volume, contour and phase is all we have to play with. The output jack socket is mounted on the guitar's lower bout, with a built-in battery compartment for easy access. If you've ever had to do an emergency battery swap at a gig when the battery terminals are hidden away inside your instrument, you'll probably want to stand and applaud this idea...

Picking up the Breedlove we find that it's a well-balanced affair that sits well in the hands. The feel of the satin finish neck is really quite appealing, too. It's a nice C-shape profile: not too chunky, neither is it too thin. We found that one or two of the tuners were a little stiff at first – this could merely be because it's a brand-new instrument – but once we got the guitar in tune we didn't have to touch them again and so they did the job faultlessly.

The guitar's action might be a fraction higher than we'd like, but probably only to the tune of 1mm or so. Easily remedied, of course, and it could also have been due to atmospheric conditions. The guitar arrived with us in a cardboard box with no case or gigbag and so it has possibly been effectively open to the elements while in transit.

Sound-wise, we were in for a pleasant surprise as the ECO Pursuit really does have a very nice singing voice. There's bags of bass but not of the boomy variety, with rich mids and sweet trebles – everything that was promised to us with the presence of myrtlewood, in fact. Chords shine and shimmer with good sustain, and individual notes demonstrate a very capable dynamic range. Anything from moody and mellow ballad style to snappy and bright blues was accommodated with ease.

Testing the pickup through our AER Compact 60, we were happy with the sound we heard pretty much from the start. As we've mentioned, there are no treble and bass controls, just a contour push-button. What happens here is effectively a midscoop and, once engaged, it has the effect of making the basses richer and the mids more transparent, while leaving the sparkle of the trebles in place. Despite the fact that there is no direct control over treble and bass as you may expect, the contour control was very effective and we didn't really yearn for anything more. ag

## ▶ VERDICT

**Breedlove certainly deserves full marks on the design front. Build quality is very good with very obvious attention to detail on behalf of the Chinese builder. There is the very slight niggle about the action height and the lack of a gigbag, but apart from that, this is a real winner from both sound and ecological points of view.**

## ▶ PROS

- Seriously well designed.
- Sounds great.
- Good price point.

## ▶ CONS

- No gig bag.

## ▶ CONTACT

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RRP: $999

# Squier 40th Anniversary Jazzmaster Gold Edition

The closest to a true Fender Jazzmaster you can get? You better believe it. **Review by Rob Laing**

We could start with some spiel about how much guitar players get for their money with a Squier compared to 40 years ago, but the brand started out very strong with Japanese-made instruments, and this is one with an RRP of $999, so is not exactly entry-level. Instead we should focus on the more interesting Squier narrative that's been unfolding in more recent history: the brand is becoming increasingly distinct in its own right. In addition to affordable takes on Fender cornerstones, there's plenty of alluring models exclusive to Squier. And if they can hold their own with the Mexican Fenders, that's cause for real celebration. We're here to find out.

The 40th Anniversary models have come in two waves; the gold hardware/block inlay 'Gold Edition' example we have here and the aged hardware/satin finished Vintage Edition guitars that are more understated. Both sets feature anodized aluminium pickguards. For us, this Jazzmaster from the former camp is the most visually appealing of the bunch; surely even gold hardware cynics can't deny this Olympic White offset wears it well. The context of a guitar's finish matters and it's interesting to see how gold anodised scratchplate and hardware gives the white more of a creamy look here in combination. It looks regal and very Fender without overstating. The build here is of a standard to match it.

We have to be honest, pau ferro fretboards can be hit and miss for us in terms of aesthetic. The issue has been sidestepped here with the use of the consistently darker Indian laurel – though it's the same material used for Squier's entry-level Affinity series. The downside is it looks quite dry, and ours would benefit from some conditioning.

The Fender-designed soapbar pickups hold their own with our Fender guitars in terms of output. The spiky, sometimes brash bridge and warm but defined neck position have a girth in character, especially on the bridge, compared to the traditional Tele, Strat and Jag. And it can divide opinion, but we're fans of the rhythm circuit 'preset' switch on the upper horn that can mellow things out quickly by isolating the neck pickup with a different capacitor and thumbwheel tone and volume controls.

Of course our big question is how well does the tuning hold up with the vibrato unit in action? And that's where our glee fades a little. It doesn't take much use to throw it out by quite a margin. Such issues aren't unusual for offset fans, and tech attention, a shim or even a third party bridge upgrade can usually offer a remedy. But for a player who doesn't know this, or isn't willing and able to deal with it, it could put them off their $1,000 purchase. So caveat emptor, but this is still the closest Squier to a true Fender Jazzmaster in the current catalogue – idiosyncrasies included.

## ▶ VERDICT

Some minor niggles, but this is a gorgeous recreation of a Jazzmaster at a very persuasive price point.

## ▶ PROS

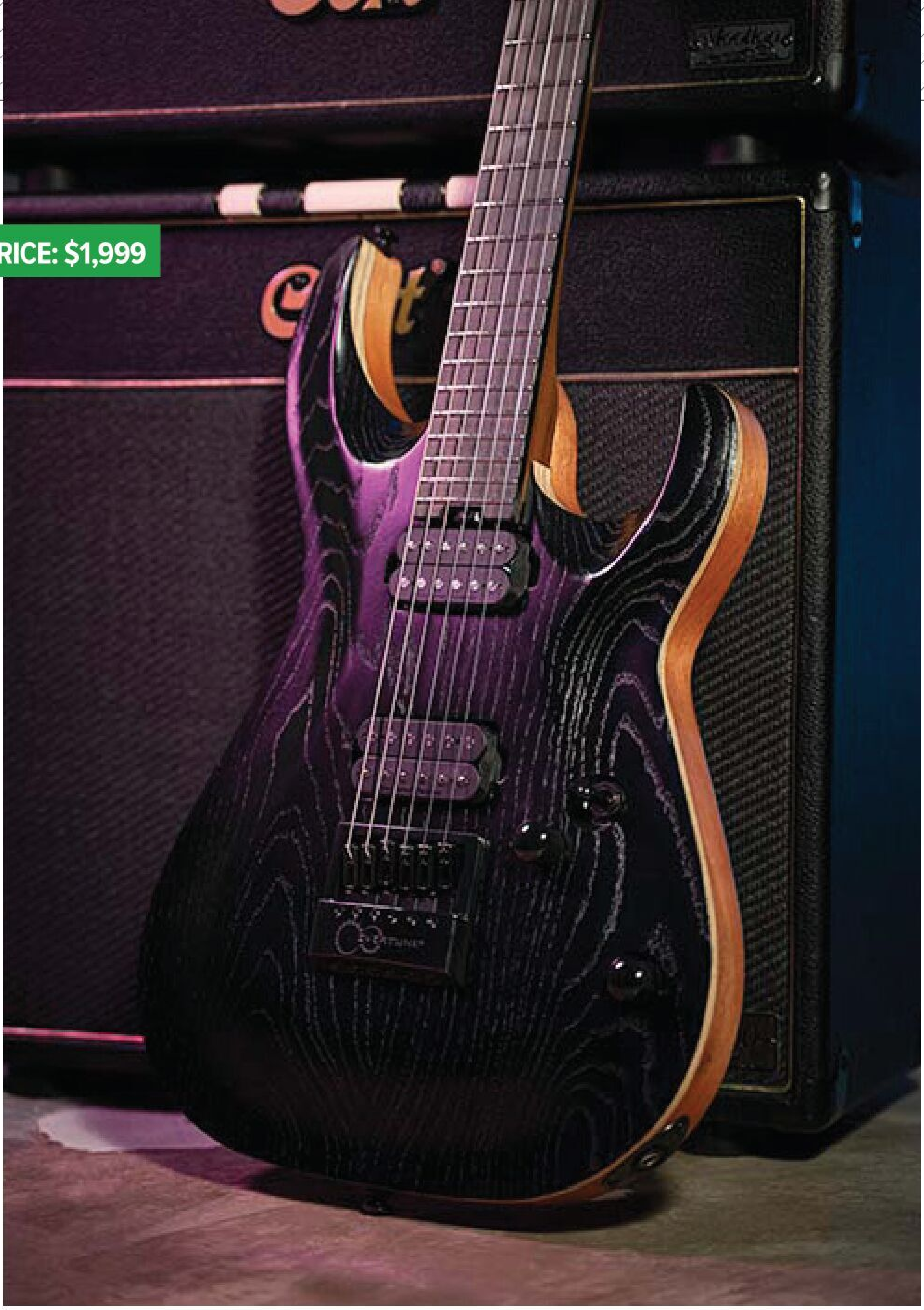
- Aesthetically brilliant.
- Extremely robust.
- Great soapbar pickups.

## ▶ CONS

- Vibrato unit throws tuning out.
- Pau ferro fretboard will be divisive.

## ▶ CONTACT

**FENDER AUSTRALIA**
Ph: 0281981300
Web: fender.com/en-au/



**PRICE: $1,999**

# Cort KX-700 EverTune

Cort comes out swinging with what might be the ultimate reasonably-priced EverTune chugger. Review by **Peter Hodgson**

Cort is one of those guitar brands - Godin is another - that doesn't feel a need to overload its books with a huge list of famous players to lure you into buying their guitars. Instead they seem to rely on the in-store experience to entice new buyers. These are the kind of guitars that you spy out of the corner of your eye and decide 'Y'know what? Before I make my final decision I'm gonna try that thing over there.' And before they know it, you've found your new guitar. Cort does this by building on its reputation as an OEM builder of guitars for other brands, and you could be playing a guitar from a Cort factory without even knowing it. But the end result for the Cort brand is a range of guitars that don't look like anything else and don't play like anything else because they're not trying to be anything else.

The KX-700 EverTune is very much a guitar of today, but it doesn't copy anything in particular, preferring instead to carve out its own identity within the arena of what we might consider a modern chugger. Pick it up and the first thing you'll notice is just how solid and high-quality it feels: although Cort has a reputation for great beginner guitars, this isn't a budget-range guitar, in build or price, and you might be surprised to realise just how confidently it sits alongside the offerings of other brands with much bigger endorsement rosters.

The body is made of Mahogany with a carved Ash top, employing a more aggressive and confident carve than the previous soft one seen on earlier Corts in this range. The carves may look pretty severe but they're thoughtfully distributed to get more sharp as they approach the body horns in a way that doesn't jam into your forearm while also elevating your picking hand to the playing area at what feels like a nicely ergonomic angle - and looking totally metal, dude.

The bolt-on neck is a five-piece Maple/Walnut affair with an Ebony fingerboard and Stainless Steel frets, and it's in the sweet-spot of not too thin, not too thick. It has a nice bare-wood feel which aids smooth transitions from one position to the next, and the fret ends are finished perfectly. There are Cort brand locking tuners keeping everything nice and neat on the three-a-side headstock.

The bridge is an EverTune, which you've surely heard of by now: this revolutionary system keeps your guitar perfectly in tune over ridiculously long periods of time via a bunch of mechanical wizardry that messes with the very notion of string tension. You can adjust the tension of each string from so tight that bends don't even register, to loosey-goosey. Some players even set up the three higher-pitched strings to be capable of wide bends while keeping the lower ones locked down to eliminate the pitch-drift of heavy picking, and it's a double-tracker's dream, yielding tight, precise tracks with great intonation. It does remove a certain amount of wood from the body, and players tend to EQ their EverTune guitars a little differently to make up for a slight loss in low end, but then again, some perceive it as a tightness to the bass frequencies and are quite happy with the results as-is.

The pickups are Seymour Duncans, a Nazgul in the bridge position and a Sentient at the neck. The Nazgul is voiced for aggressive chugs, with a cutting quality to the upper midrange that absolutely begs for loads of distortion. Electronics consist of master volume and master tone controls and a three-way pickup selector switch. Unfortunately there's no push-pull coil split, which is a shame because the Sentient sounds great in single coil mode.

The bridge pickup position is probably where players will spend most of their time on the KX-700. Pile on the gain and you'll be rewarded with a savage bite backed up with cutting high end and tight but present lows. The pitch stability of the EverTune encourages you to pick really hard, and I spent a good hour jamming along to classic thrash and death metal riffs (stuff from Sepultura's *Arise* album ate up a good chunk of this time), and it absolutely slays when it comes to modern metal riffage. The precision, the attack, the harmonics, it's all there and it sounds killer.

The Sentient is a smoother, more traditionally-voiced pickup that falls somewhere between a Duncan Jazz and '59, with both detail and warmth in equal measure. If you find that the Nazgul is too harsh for lead work, the Sentient will fill that role nicely whether you're alternate-picking like a fiend or bending like a blues dad. The middle pickup switch setting finds both humbuckers contributing in equal measure to a punchy, clear voice that's great for cleans, although you'll probably still find yourself missing dedicated single coil modes for certain sounds.

## ▶ VERDICT

**This is a serious guitar for serious players, and Cort is going to win over a lot of fans with this one. It's surprisingly affordable for a guitar this fancily appointed, the build quality is fantastic, the tones are great and the tuning stability is unsurpassed.**

## ▶ PROS

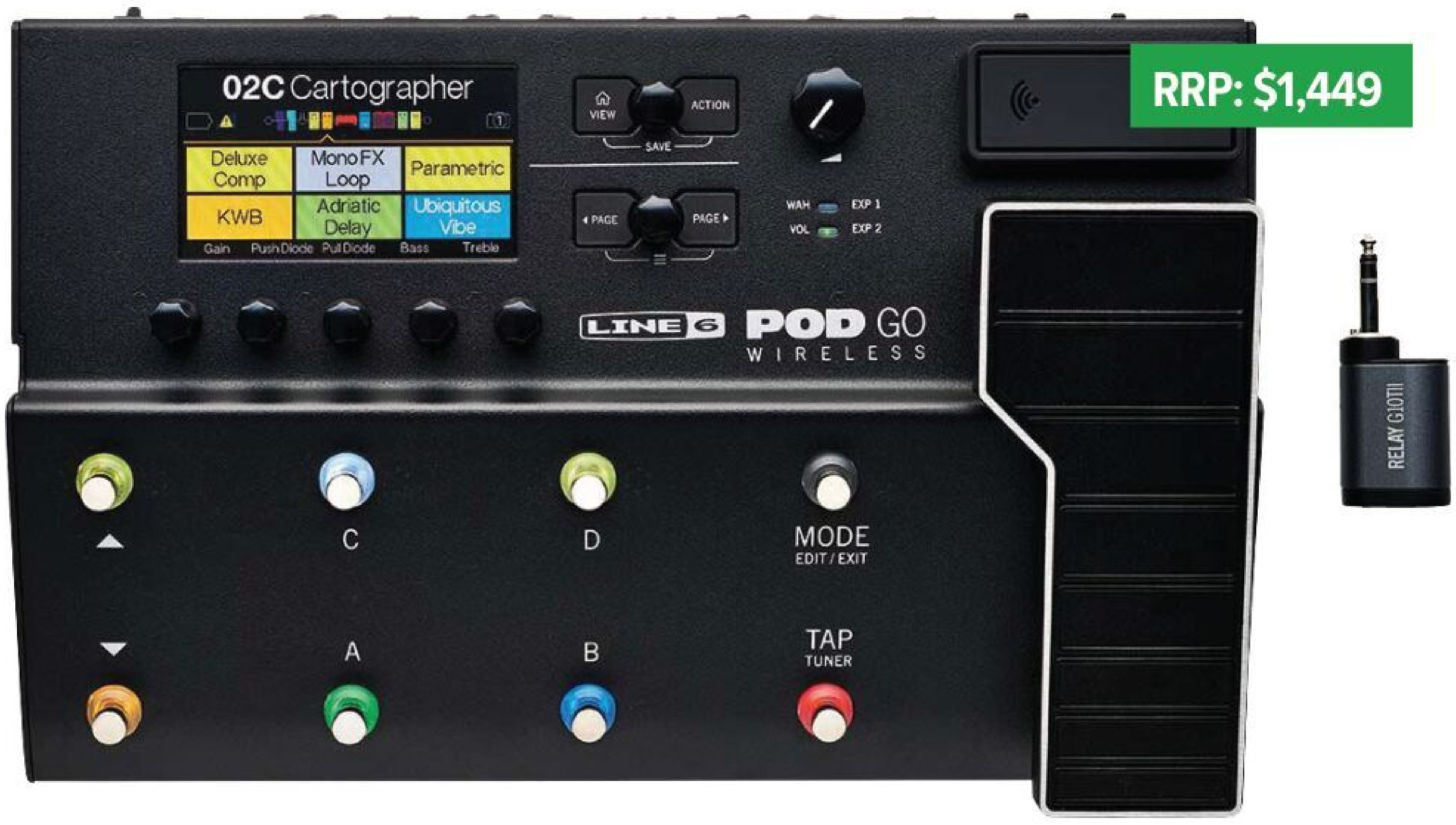
- Perfect tuning stability.
- Great tones.
- High build quality.

## ▶ CONS

- No coil split.

## ▶ CONTACT

**DYNAMIC MUSIC**
Ph: 0299391299
Web: dynamicmusic.com.au



RRP: $1,449

# Line 6 POD Go Wireless

Venture even further – on stage or at home – with a wireless connection and a whole host of sounds. **Review by Trevor Curwen**

The Line 6 range of floorboard amp and multi-effects processors has become quite expansive with the various Helix/HX models each offering a different subset of facilities to suit players' needs and budgets. But if budget is your main consideration, you may wish to take a look at the POD Go.

This unit first appeared last year, but we've just now got our hands on one, and it's the brand-new alternative version: the POD Go Wireless, which adds wireless connectivity in the form of a built-in version of the Relay G10 system. Apart from the wireless facility, both models are identical.

The POD Go uses more plastic in its construction than the more expensive Helix models, but it actually offers much of the same modelling, albeit not presented in such a versatile fashion. It includes 85 guitar and bass amp models, 39 cab models, 16 mic models and over 210 effects, plus you can also store up to 128 custom or third-party IRs.

The major difference between this and the Helix/HX models is that a preset has a semi-fixed serial path, so there's no splitting and merging of signal chains – it's a straight line from input to output. In that line there are up to 10 blocks.

Six blocks are always present (Wah, Volume, FX loop, Amp/Preamp, Cab/IR and Preset EQ), plus four more can be added anywhere in the chain. You can choose from Distortion, Dynamics, EQ, Modulation, Delay, Reverb, Pitch/Synth, Filter and Looper blocks to fill the four vacant slots. There are 256 presets onboard (128 factory, 128 user) arranged in banks of four.

Editing is easy enough from the front panel, but you can take advantage of the POD Go computer-based editor and librarian available via a USB connection to speedily and smoothly set up your presets with a few mouse moves.

Straight out of the box, the POD Go's presets offer a fully processed signal chain with amp/cab and effects.

With Line 6's usual varied selection of modelled amps and the possibility of loading your own IRs, there is tonal variation to cover many musical scenarios just waiting to be dialled in. Alternatively, if you just want it as a pedalboard for use with your amp, you can create a series of presets with the amp and cabinet modelling switched off just for that purpose.

There's an excellent variety of effects, plus you can use the effects loop to add external pedals (with or without footswitch control) or for employing the four-cable method (actually a three-cable method with the wireless version!). The eight footswitches and the pedal treadle on the POD Go are perfectly set up to give you plenty of flexibility for onstage use.

As standard, the unit boots up in Preset mode so you get the four presets in a bank assigned to footswitches A, B, C and D, with bank changes facilitated by the Up and Down footswitches – you can use them to scroll to the next needed bank and then hit the relevant A, B, C or D footswitch to load the preset.

A Mode footswitch toggles directly between Preset and Stomp mode, which lays out six of the effects blocks in the preset across all six of the footswitches – usefully equipped with a colour-coded ring to help identify at a glance which effect is which.

This facilitates the working method of having each preset as a different pedalboard perfectly, but there is a third mode that uses snapshots: presets within a preset that can recall every block's bypass state and up to 64 simultaneous parameter settings. Snapshot mode is entered by pressing the up and down footswitches simultaneously.

The POD Go Wireless comes with a Relay G10TII transmitter that plugs into any guitar with a flat-mounted front or side socket, and is shaped to slot perfectly into a Strat. The floor unit has a rear-panel slot in which you can store the transmitter when not in use, and the standard guitar input doubles as a charging port for it whenever you're not using the POD Go.

Once charged, you'll get about seven hours of playing time out of the transmitter and you get visual indications of its charged status; there are three green bars like a mobile phone in the floor unit's display, and the transmitter itself has a green LED that flashes red if you have less than 30 minutes left.

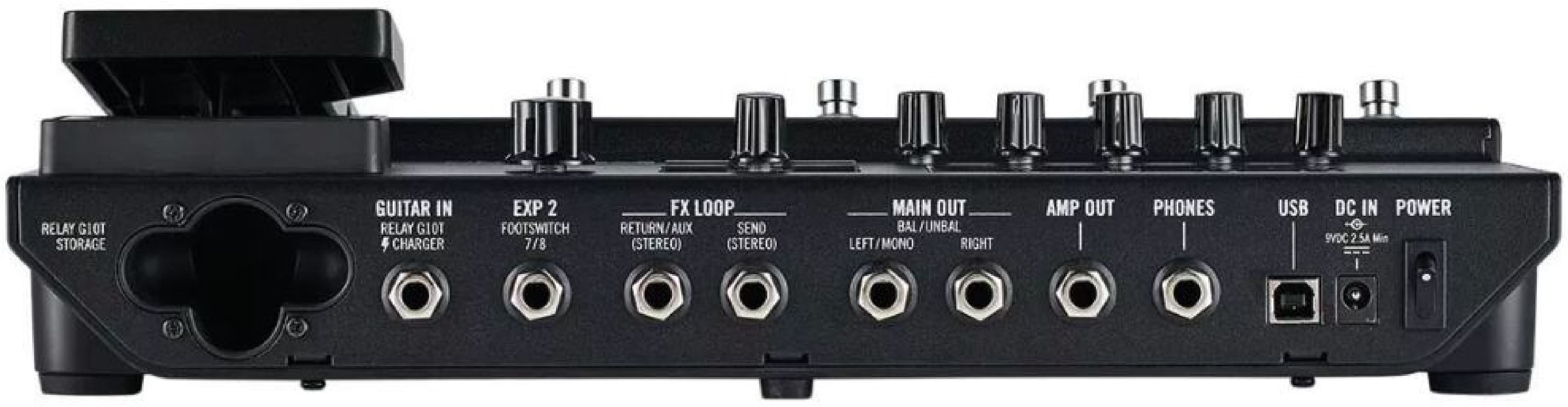
The actual wireless performance is potent, the signal is strong and sparkly, but if you yearn for the treble loss engendered by using a long cable, there's an adjustable parameter for HF roll-off. The range is good – line of sight is best, but we were also able to sit in the kitchen and have a snack while playing guitar and hearing the amp in the next room.

We do wonder why Line 6 didn't go the whole hi-tech hog and add Bluetooth for wireless headphones, too. It would certainly make sense to be sitting on the sofa untethered from the whole unit enjoying a bit of headphone practice.

If you're just going to have one floor pedal and you find the prices of the Helix range are out of reach then the POD Go may be your ideal purchase. Okay, there's less flexibility, but that can also translate as being easier to use – and its compact, easily portable size and built-in treadle are real plus points.

As with others in this genre, it's a versatile unit that lends itself to onstage use into the PA or in front of your amp, whether standalone or integrated into a larger pedal rig. It's also got everything you need for home practice and recording, too, including a 24-bit audio interface for recording and a one- or six-switch looper.

Either version offers great value for money, but whether the wireless version is worth the extra outlay is down to how you want to use it – it'll certainly free up your onstage experience.



## ▶ VERDICT

**If you're just going to have one floor pedal and you find the prices of the Helix range are out of reach then the POD Go may be your ideal purchase. Okay, there's less flexibility, but that can also translate as being easier to use.**

## ▶ PROS

- Compact and portable.
- Easy wireless capability.
- Expansive range of amps and effects.

## ▶ CONS

- Signal chain is less flexible than other Line 6 models.
- A wireless headphone send would have been a bonus.

## ▶ CONTACT

**YAMAHA MUSIC AUSTRALIA**

Ph: (03) 9693 5111

Web: au.yamaha.com

**PRICE: $2,299**

# Markbass CMD 102P IV

Looking for a combo that can get out of your way when you need it to but can also roar when it has to? Markbass puts it at your feet.

Review by **Peter Hodgson**

Over the past decade-and-a-half of writing for Australian Guitar it's been exciting to watch the Markbass brand go from 'hey, what's that funny amp brand with the yellow logo?' to an undeniable juggernaut of the bass amplification world. They've achieved this with a solid commitment to continual improvement: earlier Markbass efforts were already starting at a pretty respectable level, but as time goes on you can track a clear evolution in build quality, and see various features go from interesting additions to indispensable tools for tone creation.

The CMD 102P IV may have a pretty boring model name but it's anything but run-of-the-mill. This 2X10 combo has everything you need and a whole bunch of features that you may not require yet but which will come in handy for you down the line. Let's have a closer look to see what that means.

There are really two elements to what makes this unit special: the amp itself and the form factor. The amp section is based around a four-band EQ section offering 16dB of boost or cut at 68 Hz (Low), 360 Hz (Mid Low), 800 Hz (Mid High) and 10 kHz (High). On top of that there's a knob labelled 'Old School' which provides a high frequency cut range of 250 Hz – 20 kHz to give you a rounder, smoother tone like ye amps of olde, plus a three-way switch to select between Flat and Scooped-Mid voicings, with the third notch (FSW) standing for 'Footswitch.' Select this mode and you'll be able to connect a foot switch to toggle between both voicings, great for scooping the mids for slap-and-pop or metal styles then going back to a flatter voice for more general playing.

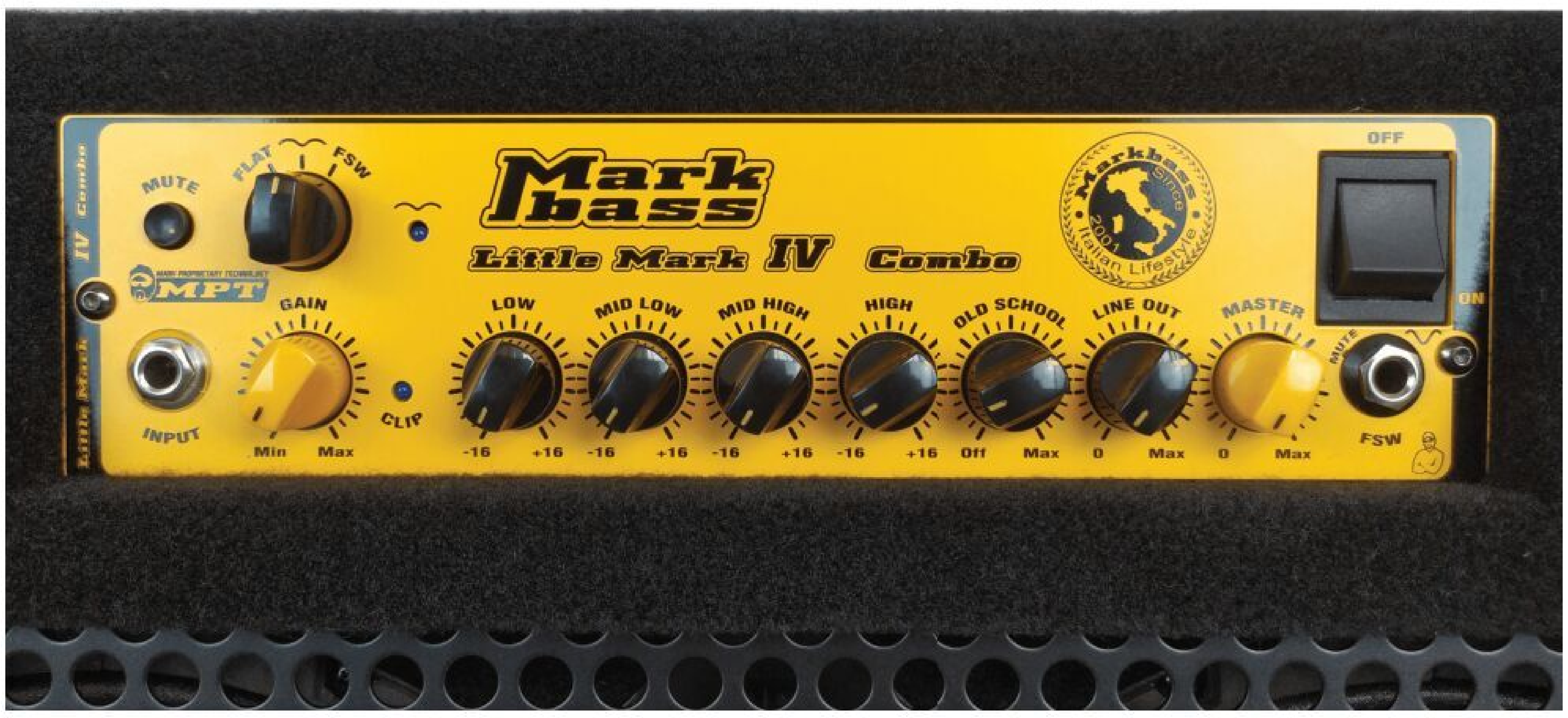
There's also a bi-band limiter, an input gain control (but think of this as optimising the signal hitting the preamp, rather than a distortion level control like on a guitar amp). The limiter is a newly designed circuit intended to respond faster and more dynamically to your playing than traditional limiters do, while still letting the high end breathe and to not feel all constricted and squishy.

There's also a Mute switch, a Line Out level control, pre/post EQ switch and a ground lift switch. Outputs include Effects send (and return, of course), a tuner out, a balanced XLR line out and two speaker outs. The combo stacks perfectly with any Traveler or Standard series cabinets if you want to do the extension cabinet thang, but here's also where the form factor gets interesting: this amp is designed in a wedge shape so you can use it like a floor monitor onstage, sending a line out to front of house for maximum control for your sound engineer while also pointing those twin 10" speakers up at your face. And it's not all left to those two speakers: there's also a piezo tweeter and front bass porting for a full-range sonic experience. You can even chose to kick the combo back to function as a monitor and DI while running a speaker cable to an extension cab elsewhere on the stage if you wish.

The most fun thing about Markbass gear is how very flexible it can be. For instance, the flat EQ mode on the three way switch may suit you well for general tone-shaping abilities now, but later down the track you may find yourself using it to get a flatter response in order to amplify a fancy digital processor. Or you may choose to run a processor straight into the effects loop return, to use the unit as a powered speaker. Markbass power amps are so clean, powerful, loud and clear that you'll be able to get a very faithful reproduction of your presets.

And yet Markbass's preamps are also so well-voiced that you might not even want to plug anything else into the unit other than your favourite bass. If you're a more traditional player, that Old School knob is going to give you those rich, deep, subby tones for soul, blues and R&B. But if you're playing more hi-fi stuff, that scooped setting will make you a very happy slapper. The sheer range of all the available EQ-shaping controls means you'll be able to get the very best out of your gain pedals such as distortions, compressors, fuzzes and preamps.

I tested the CMD 102P IV with various basses including an Ibanez Soundgear semi-hollowbody five-string with active pickups and a three-band EQ (with its own three-bad mid re-voicing switch) plus a Squier Bass VI with Seymour Duncan Hot For Jazz pickups - my go-to old-school-sounding bass - and at no point did I feel that the amp was overriding each instrument's personality, nor did I feel that all the amp was doing was amplifying my bass.



## ▶ VERDICT

**The Markbass magic lies in how their products can be extremely transparent, but in a way that you can't achieve by just plugging a bass into a transparent PA system. And they're so road-friendly, both in features and in weight, that it's a pleasure to crank one up to distracting levels.**

## ▶ PROS

- Hugely flexible EQ.
- Loud clean power.
- Versatile form factor.

## ▶ CONS

- No dedicated distortion / drive.

## ▶ CONTACT

**CMC MUSIC**
Ph: (02) 9905 2511
Web: cmcmusic.com.au

RRP: $799

# Fender Pro Junior IV SE 1x10 combo

Fender's entry-level valve combo gets a limited-edition run that's more affordable than the standard model. It might just be the bargain of the year... **Review by Nick Guppy**

Fender's highly popular Pro Junior was an instant hit when it was launched back in 1993 and continues to be a favourite secret weapon for many top artists, regularly found hiding behind walls of 100-watt 4x12 stacks at live shows. We often talk about the classic tweed and black-panel designs dating back to the 1950s and 60s. However, the Pro and Blues amps from the early 90s are largely unaltered and still in production today, making them possibly the longest-running in Fender's history. The latest Mark IV core version of the Pro Junior features lacquered tweed and a Jensen P10R Alnico speaker, which looks and sounds great – but it has pushed up the price somewhat, hence the welcome arrival of the limited-edition SE version we're looking at here.

No relation to Fender's original 6L6- powered Pro amps, the Pro Junior SE is a compact all-valve, solid-state rectified 1x10 combo, using a pair of 12AX7s in the preamp and a pair of grid-biased Groove Tubes EL84s in the output stage, driving a Fender Special Design loudspeaker. Unlike some small combos where the speaker is wired directly into the chassis, the Pro Junior SE connects via a jack plug and socket, so you can unplug the speaker and use an external cabinet if needed.

The cabinet's styling blends a narrow-panel tweed-era enclosure with black Tolex and a lightly-aged silver sparkle grille cloth for a pleasing visual effect. Under the vinyl you'll find particle board rather than plywood, which adds a little extra weight, although the combo is still just 10kg, so it's very easy to lift and carry.

The robust steel tray chassis supports generously sized mains and output transformers and is bolted to the cabinet top and sides, with the top chassis edge forming the control panel. Inside, the components are mounted on two printed circuit boards: a large one for all the preamp, power amp and power supply stuff and a small strip of PCB supporting the downward-pointing valve bases, joined to the main board by four ribbon cables. The board and component quality is much improved compared with some earlier models; quality resistors and capacitors are held firmly on through-plated PCBs.

As to the controls, they couldn't be much simpler: a single input jack feeding a pair of black chickenhead knobs for volume and tone on a chrome panel, with a single on/off power switch and Fender's trademark jewel power indicator, which now uses an LED instead of a filament bulb. The lens can't be unscrewed on this part, so you can have any colour you like as long as it's red. The volume and tone circuits have been tweaked to make them more useful, with a wider range at lower volumes and a more balanced bass response as the volume goes up. Overall, the Pro Junior SE is a good-looking, well-made small amp that's built to survive live gigs as well as home practice and recording sessions.

We tried out the Pro Junior SE with our regular Strat and a Les Paul loaded with a pair of old PAF humbuckers, which together cover a wide range of familiar sounds. The amp comes to life with practically zero hiss and hum, potentially making it a great platform for effects users. With a Les Paul plugged in, the signal stays more or less clean until the volume control's halfway mark is reached, slightly more with the lower-output single coils of a Strat. Push the volume knob beyond this and while things don't get much louder, they get a lot wilder as the Pro Junior SE begins to distort in a very pleasing way, beginning with a mild edge that's great for jazz and country and morphing into a really satisfying tweed/early Marshall crunch ideal for blues and classic rock.

The revised volume control has a more gradual change from clean to overdrive, making the amp much easier to dial in, with less of the fuzzbox-flavoured bass at full power. The tone control seems to like staying at around the 12 o'clock position, which is a good starting point for any guitar you feel like plugging into the single jack socket, tweaking it clockwise to enhance single-coil snap and brighten up humbuckers, or anti-clockwise to add woody jazz warmth to your archtop.

Midrange and bass are both nicely balanced, too. Our Les Paul sounded great, picking out Jeff Beck and Billy Gibbons-inspired tones with ease. Meanwhile, the lower-powered pickups in our Strat came to life with a little help from a self-built Jeds Peds D-style overdrive pedal, which worked really well with the amp, adding clean/crunch/lead flexibility.

The Pro Junior's overdrive characteristics are somewhat different from the classic 6V6-powered Fenders, with less midrange and a punchier fixed bias dynamic response, which works really nicely with the 10-inch Fender Special Design loudspeaker. This is partly down to the EL84's high-gain characteristics. It's interesting to see how this European small pentode valve (basically a lower-powered version of the EL34) has been Americanised over the past half a century, becoming a popular choice in many USA mid-powered amps, from budget models such as the Pro Junior up to high-end hand-wired boutique designs costing many thousands of pounds. We should point out in passing that the Pro Junior SE's output valve bias is fixed and non-adjustable – accordingly, it's a good idea not to stray from the factory-fitted valve rating.

As you might expect, there's no USB or speaker emulation output here, so for serious recording or stage use a good microphone or two will come in handy. We tend to reach for Sennheiser's excellent MD 421 with this kind of amp in the studio, where this particular mic's bass roll-off switch and the slightly squeezed frequency range of the 10-inch loudspeaker need very little extra EQ treatment to produce a great range of tones.

For live use, the Pro Junior SE will surprise you – there's more than enough volume to handle smaller unmic'd pub venues. Although if you need lots of clean headroom a little help from the PA may be needed.

Amp technology continues to grow and evolve, with digital power adding the kind of flexibility that would have needed several expensive studio outboards just a few years ago. Yet in spite of these advances, there's always going to be a need for real valve tone that's affordable and portable. Many people equate valves with expense, so to find that you can still buy a proper allvalve Fender in the Pro Junior IV SE for less than $1,000 is a bit of an eyeopener.

This amp should tick all the boxes for many players, from beginners looking for a first amp that they can keep and grow with, to demanding professional guitarists. You can slot it into the tiniest space on the smallest of stages, while the low noise performance is great news for pedal users and studios. The upgraded circuit boards – a long overdue improvement – will transform the amp's longterm reliability, and while the speaker lacks some of the P10R's harmonic complexity and sparkle, it still sounds great and can always be upgraded if you feel the need.

## VERDICT

This is a highly usable all-valve Fender amp at a price that's way more affordable than you might expect.

## PROS

- Good looking.
- Wide range of tone from deceptively simple layout.
- Affordable.

## CONS

- At this price very litte.

## CONTACT

**FENDER AUSTRALIA**
Ph: 0281981300
Web: fender.com/en-au/

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PEAVEY
VYPYR X2

**RRP: $599**

# Peavey Vypyr X2

A well-equipped and capable performer at a very attractive price point.

**Review by Art Thompson**

Peavey's Vypyr series amplifiers give players options to fit their needs and budgets by offering three different combo formats: the X1 30-watt 1x8, the X2 60-watt 1x12, on review here, and the X3 100-watt 1x12. All of them utilize analog TransTube circuitry for the amplifier distortion sounds in order to impart realistic feel to the tones, and they offer 10 instruments models (two for the X1), 36 amp models (including six acoustic and six bass models), 24 digital effects (none for the X1), and 12 stompbox models.

Additionally, all have a built-in 30-second looper and wah that are accessible when you add the optional Sanpera I or II foot controller. All other functions are available from the top of the amp, and you can also control the X2 and X3 models via Bluetooth on your iOS device via the free Vypyr app. The Vypyr X2 doesn't have the LED display of the pricier X3 but otherwise is functionally similar.

There are four buttons next to the input jack that toggle between Guitar 1, Guitar 2, Acoustic and Bass, and each has four presets that will get you up and running without even touching a knob. The two electric guitar presets are quite heavily effected and seem more like demonstrations of what the Vypyr can do, rather than sounds you would deploy in a gig. However, the Acoustic and Bass models are basic and quite handy when you just need to get a good sound quickly.

From there, you can easily shape things with the inst/stomp knob, which has 12 stops, each providing two settings as you turn the knob: Acoustic 1/2, 12str/7str, Res/Sit, Evio/Syn, Bari/Bss, Tsc/Fuzz, Comp/Bst, Aphs/Aflg, Wah/Slice, Achr/Uvb, Rmd/Slap and bypass. These presets provide many different sounds, and you can adjust two parameters by pressing the inst/stomp knob and using the pre-gain and low controls to make EQ, gain and other tweaks depending on the selected model.

Next in line is the amplifiers knob which selects Budda, 6505, 6534, XXX, Classic, Butcher, British, Twin, Peavey and Trace bass amps, as well as Peavey Ecous and Trace acoustic amps. Each offers low-, medium- and high-gain tones when you press the knob (a corresponding LED glows green, orange or red), and the same holds for the acoustic and bass amps, where you can choose between three tonal variations of each. I was impressed by the sound of the guitar amps, which provide a wide range of touch-responsive tones that cover the spectrum from clean to viciously overdriven, particularly the Budda and 6505, 6534 and XXX models.

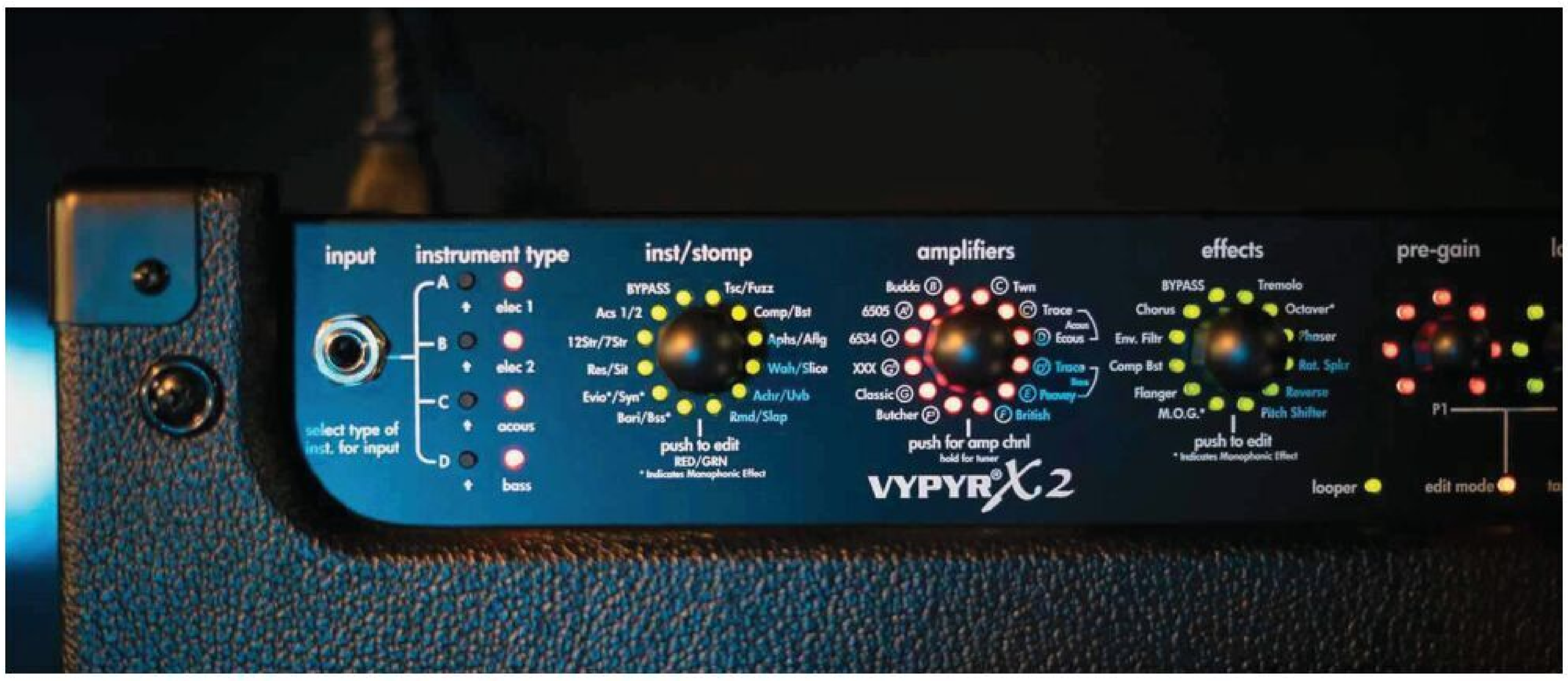
Classic is a great all-rounder for clean and medium-gain duties (and well beyond, if needed), and the British model offers a good representation of Vox/Matchless tone and does a nice job of delivering that "blizzard of nails" grind on the orange and red settings. I liked the richness even at low volume, and the pre-gain, bass, middle treble and post-gain knobs made it easy to get happening tones with guitars that included a Gibson Les Paul '59 Heritage, Reverend Gristlemaster and a '63 LP Junior.

The third knob handles effects, and here you have Chorus, Env. Filtr, Comp BST, Flanger, M.O.G., Pitch Shifter, Reverse, Rot. Spkr, Phaser, Octaver, Tremolo and bypass. In addition, a press of the knob lets you adjust two parameters using the pre-gain and low knobs. Delay and reverb are global functions, and it's convenient that you can just reach down and tweak them with the dual-function mid, high and post-gain controls, which respectively adjust delay feedback (repeats), delay level and reverb level.

The Vypyr X2's knob-based interface is intuitive and easy to use. However, to unlock the potential of this amp — especially for live use — a foot controller is needed. Fortunately Peavey sent me the Sanpera II, a rugged, wing-shaped unit that has a dedicated volume pedal on the left side, with a toe switch to activate the tuner and another pedal on the right with a toe switch that activates the wah or lets you alter the rate of a modulation effect (a red LED indicates when modulation is active).

A pair of bank up/down switches on the right let you toggle through the 99 presets offered, in addition to the previously mentioned A, B, C and D presets on the amp's top panel. If you're in Manual mode (indicated by a green LED) and you select a preset with effects, you can turn them on and off individually with the foot switches labeled 1 to 4. In Normal mode (red LED) the foot switches let you toggle between any four presets you've stored. Either way, you get much more flexibility for live performance. And let's not forget that there's also a dedicated tap-tempo foot switch and two more stomp switches that control the looper's record, play and stop/reset functions.

All in all, the Vypyr X2 is a good-sounding stage amp with the warmth, punch and presence often missing in digital modelers. It's the most muscular for its power that I've tried so far, and if you don't want to shell out for a Sanpera foot controller, you can always run distortion, modulation and delay pedals in the front end, and the Vypyr handles 'em fine. ag



### ▶ VERDICT

**The Vypyr is a well-equipped and capable performer, and a very cool deal, considering everything it does.**

### ▶ PROS

- Tube-like tone and feel.
- Intuitive interface.
- Excellent sounding effects.

### ▶ CONS

- Sanpera I or II foot-controller required to access the wah and looper.
- Amp makes a "thump" when turned on or off

### ▶ CONTACT

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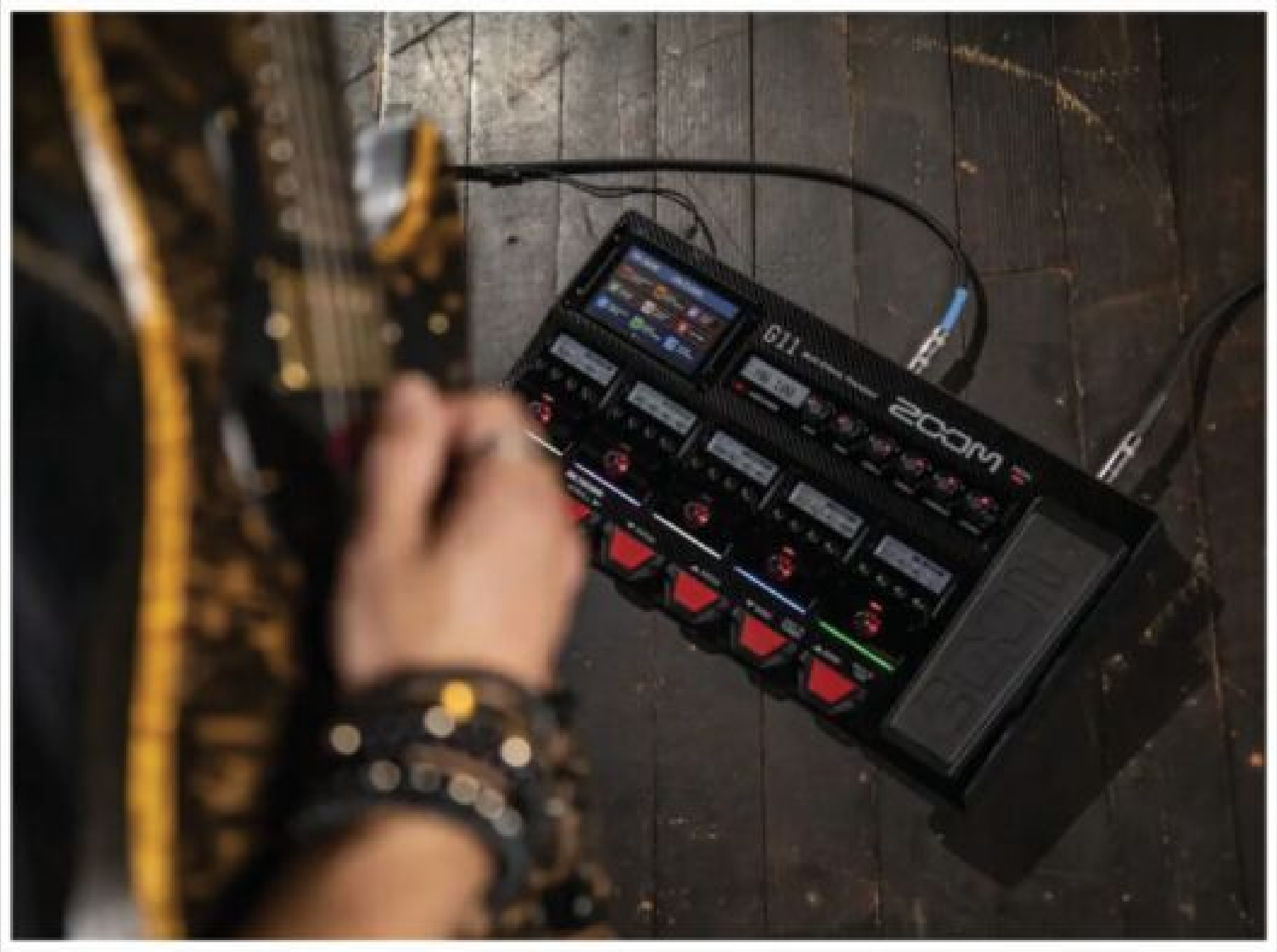
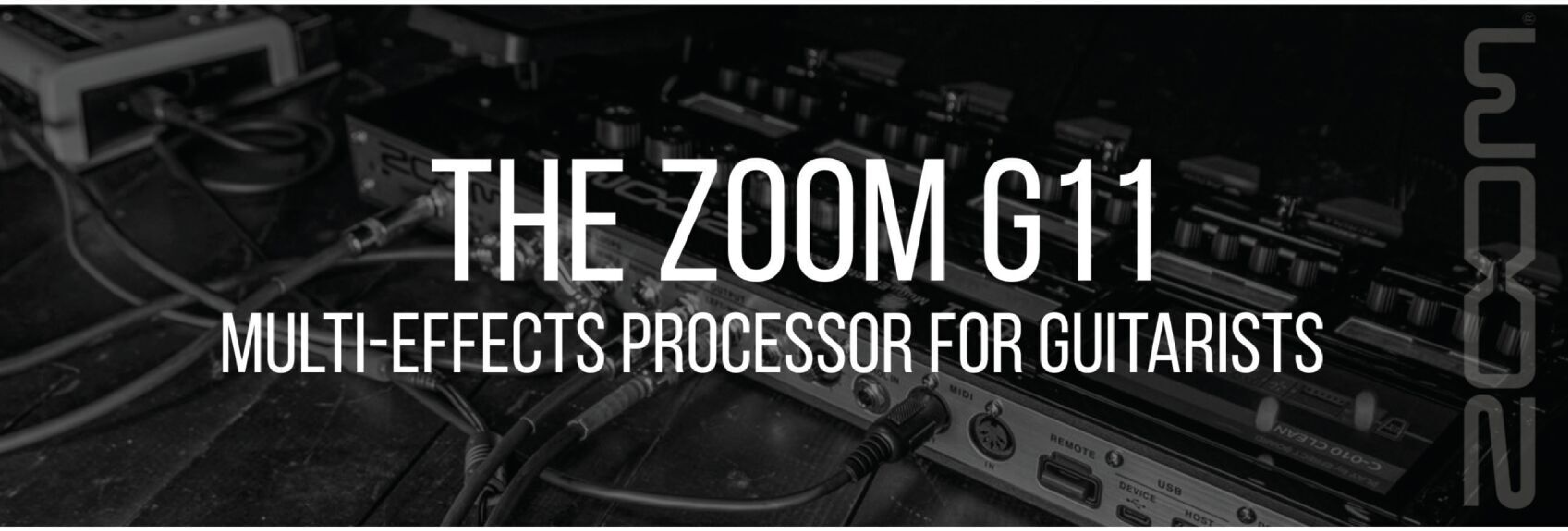
SCROLL ▶
▼ PATCH
▲ PATCH
▼ BANK
HOLD TO TUNER
▲ BANK
HOLD TO TAP





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